

METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR PERFORMING, MONITORING AND ANALYZING
MULTIPLE MACHINE FLUID PROCESSES

INVENTOR

John K. Apostolides

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application Serial No. 10/612,205, filed on July 2, 2003, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application Serial No. 09/772,604, filed on January 30, 2001, now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 6,708,710, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application Serial No. 09/435,375, filed on November 5, 1999, now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 6,216,732, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application Serial No. 08/961,339, filed on October 30, 1997, now abandoned.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Machines such as large-capacity diesel engine systems used in connection with construction equipment, earth-moving equipment, transportation equipment (e.g., locomotives) and the like, are often implemented in adverse operating conditions. Typical operating conditions for such equipment can require extensive maintenance, repair and overhaul work to sustain the equipment and its components, including the engine systems. As a consequence of adverse equipment operating conditions, certain equipment components may be exhausted long before the expected end of their useful lives. This component exhaustion can occur despite efforts to ensure proper component installation and maintenance, including

periodic maintenance of equipment oil supply and lubrication systems, for example. Extensive and premature wear of large-capacity diesel engines, for example, can be caused by a combination of factors, including inadequate lubrication of components prior to engine ignition, failure to adhere to prescribed maintenance schedules, failure to collect and analyze data associated with equipment operation, system malfunction, general misuse of the equipment, and other factors.

[0003] Methods and systems for data collection and analysis are therefore needed that can extend the useful life of equipment components. Component movement and interaction during various periods of equipment operation can impact the continued effective operation and useful life expectancy of the engine system. In connection with operation and/or maintenance of the engine system during such periods, important data such as, for example, temperature, oil pressure, time to evacuate an oil sump, and historical data regarding previous engine ignition cycles can be collected and analyzed. Conventional equipment methods and systems, however, typically do not collect and analyze data during various stages of machine operation to assist in operation or maintenance of the machine and its components.

[0004] In addition, in the context of performing machine maintenance, there is often a need for performing multiple evacuations and/or refills of fluid receptacles. Such fluid receptacles may include, for example and without limitation, oil sumps, transmission fluid reservoirs, fuel tanks, waste-receiving receptacles, hydraulic fluid reservoirs, and other like receptacles associated with machine operation and maintenance. In many situations, such fluid evacuation and fluid refill processes may not be timed and/or sequenced to maximize performance of maintenance on a machine. Furthermore, data crucial to scheduling maintenance

and monitoring performance issues with machines are often neither collected nor analyzed during fluid evacuations, fluid refills, or other fluid processing activities.

[0005] Many industrial machines and equipment have requirements for fluid exchanges. Examples of these fluid exchanges include changing the oil in motors and engines or hydraulic fluid in presses and lifting equipment. Countless other examples exist, but what is generally common to these machines or equipment is the fact that the outlet port is inconveniently located. Typically this is the result of having to remove the fluid from a sump or drainage point that is located at the bottom of the machine to utilize gravity flow.

[0006] The tasks of removing and refilling machine fluids may be difficult or time consuming because of the usually inconvenient location of the fittings required to perform these fluid operations. Some machines, however, may include fluid circulation pumps that are installed and applied in locations that are external to the machine. Also, some equipment may be provided with one or more internally or externally located pre-lubrication devices that permit oil or fluid to commence circulation prior to the activation of the primary equipment or engine on which the pre-lubrication device is installed. Illustrative of such devices is the pre-lubrication device shown in U.S. Patent No. 4,502,431, which is incorporated herein by reference, and which is typically fitted to a diesel engine used in power equipment, trucks and/or heavy equipment.

[0007] Furthermore, in certain off-road heavy equipment, reservoirs containing fluids may contain scores of gallons of fluid, which can consume unacceptably long periods of time to drain and refill. For example, in some equipment, an engine oil sump or reservoir may contain up to 150 gallons of oil; a transmission sump may contain up to 100 gallons of transmission

fluid; and a separate reservoir of hydraulic fluid to power hydraulic functions may contain up to 500 gallons of hydraulic fluid. Downtime costs for relatively large machines and other pieces of equipment can be substantial. Accordingly, if downtime for maintenance in such machines can be minimized, then substantial economic benefits often result. In addition, there are numerous comparatively smaller devices and motors for which access to fluid discharge ports is difficult to reach or in which the fluid must be assisted for removal. Examples include marine engines and the like. In some small-sized pieces of equipment, the engine must be inverted to remove oil, for example, or other fluids. For example, see United States Patent Nos. 5,526,782; 5,257,678; and, 4,977,978.

[0008] Thus, what are needed are improved methods and systems for performing fluid maintenance functions, such as fluid evacuation and refill processes, for example, in connection with machine operation and maintenance. What are also needed are enhanced methods and systems for sequencing and timing fluid operations, while collecting, storing and/or analyzing data pertinent to the performance and results of such fluid transfer operations.

SUMMARY

[0009] The present invention provides various embodiments of a valve assembly. The embodiments may include a first check valve structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of positive pressure at an inlet of the first check valve, further comprising an outlet of the first check valve being in fluid communication with at least a portion of a fluid system; a second check valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the first

check valve, the second check valve being structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of negative pressure at the outlet of the second check valve; and, an inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the first check valve and the outlet of the second check valve at a common refill/evacuation location. In certain embodiments, the fluid system portion includes at least a pre-filter portion.

[0010] The present invention provides various embodiments of a valve system. The embodiments may include a first valve assembly comprising, a first check valve structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of positive pressure at an inlet of the first check valve, further comprising an outlet of the first check valve being in fluid communication with a first portion of a fluid system; a second check valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the first check valve, the second check valve being structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of negative pressure at the outlet of the second check valve; a first inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the first check valve and the outlet of the second check valve at a first common refill/evacuation location; a second valve assembly comprising, a third check valve structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of positive pressure at an inlet of the third check valve, further comprising an outlet of the third check valve being in fluid communication with a second portion of a fluid system; a fourth check valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the third check valve, the fourth check valve being structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of negative pressure at the outlet of the fourth check valve; and, a second inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the third check valve and the outlet of the fourth check valve at a second common refill/evacuation location.

The valve system may further include at least a third valve assembly comprising, a fifth check valve structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of positive pressure at an inlet of the fifth check valve, further comprising an outlet of the fifth check valve being in fluid communication with a third portion of a fluid system; a sixth check valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the fifth check valve, the sixth check valve being structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of negative pressure at the outlet of the sixth check valve; and, a third inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the fifth check valve and the outlet of the sixth check valve at a third common refill/evacuation location.

[0011] Embodiments of a valve assembly provided in accordance with the present invention may include a first electronic valve structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to sensing application of positive pressure at an inlet of the first electronic valve, further comprising an outlet of the first electronic valve being in fluid communication with a first portion of a fluid system; a second electronic valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the first electronic valve, the second electronic valve being structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to sensing application of negative pressure at the outlet of the electronic check valve; and, an inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the first electronic valve and the outlet of the second electronic valve at a common refill/evacuation location.

[0012] Embodiments of a valve system provided in accordance with the present invention may include a first electronic valve assembly comprising, a first electronic valve structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to sensing application of positive

pressure at an inlet of the first electronic valve, further comprising an outlet of the first electronic valve being in fluid communication with a first portion of a fluid system; a second electronic valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the first electronic valve, the second electronic valve being structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to sensing application of negative pressure at the outlet of the electronic check valve; a first inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the first electronic valve and the outlet of the second electronic valve at a first common refill/evacuation location; at least a second electronic valve assembly comprising, a third electronic valve structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to sensing application of positive pressure at an inlet of the third electronic valve, further comprising an outlet of the third electronic valve being in fluid communication with a second portion of a fluid system; a fourth electronic valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the third electronic valve, the fourth electronic valve being structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to sensing application of negative pressure at the outlet of the fourth electronic check valve; and, a second inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the third electronic valve and the outlet of the fourth electronic valve at a second common refill/evacuation location.

[0013] Embodiments of a module provided in accordance with the present invention may include a first valve assembly comprising a first check valve structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of positive pressure at an inlet of the first check valve, further comprising an outlet of the first check valve being in fluid communication with a first portion of a fluid system; a second check valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the first check valve, the second check valve being structured to permit fluid flow

therethrough in response to application of negative pressure at the outlet of the second check valve; a first inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the first check valve and the outlet of the second check valve at a first common refill/evacuation location; at least a second valve assembly comprising, a third check valve structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of positive pressure at an inlet of the third check valve, further comprising an outlet of the third check valve being in fluid communication with a second portion of a fluid system; a fourth check valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the third check valve, the fourth check valve being structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of negative pressure at the outlet of the fourth check valve; a second inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the third check valve and the outlet of the fourth check valve at a second common refill/evacuation location; and, the first and second valve assemblies being coupled together to form the module.

[0014] Embodiments of a module provided in accordance with the present invention may include a first electronic valve assembly comprising a first electronic valve structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to sensing application of positive pressure at an inlet of the first electronic valve, further comprising an outlet of the first electronic valve being in fluid communication with a first portion of a fluid system; a second electronic valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the first electronic valve, the second electronic valve being structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to sensing application of negative pressure at the outlet of the electronic check valve; a first inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the first electronic valve and the outlet of the second electronic valve at a first common refill/evacuation location; at least a second electronic valve assembly

comprising a third electronic valve structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to sensing application of positive pressure at an inlet of the third electronic valve, further comprising an outlet of the third electronic valve being in fluid communication with a second portion of a fluid system; a fourth electronic valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the third electronic valve, the fourth electronic valve being structured to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to sensing application of negative pressure at the outlet of the fourth electronic check valve; a second inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the third electronic valve and the outlet of the fourth electronic valve at a second common refill/evacuation location; and, the first and second electronic valve assemblies being coupled together to form the module.

[0015] Embodiments of a method of performing at least one fluid operation in a fluid system are provided in accordance with the present invention. Embodiments of the method may include structuring a first check valve to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of positive pressure at an inlet of the first check valve, further structuring the first check valve with an outlet in fluid communication with a first portion of a fluid system; structuring a second check valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the first check valve, further structuring the second check valve to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of negative pressure at the outlet of the second check valve; and, positioning an inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the first check valve and the outlet of the second check valve at a common refill/evacuation location.

[0016] Embodiments of a method of performing a fluid operation may be provided in accordance with the present invention. Embodiments of the method may include structuring a

first check valve to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of positive pressure at an inlet of the first check valve, further structuring the first check valve with an outlet in fluid communication with a portion of a fluid system; structuring a second check valve having an outlet in fluid communication with the inlet of the first check valve, further structuring the second check valve to permit fluid flow therethrough in response to application of negative pressure at the outlet of the second check valve; positioning an inlet/outlet port in fluid communication with the inlet of the first check valve and the outlet of the second check valve at a common refill/evacuation location; applying positive pressure at the common refill/evacuation location to purge at least a pre-filter portion of the portion of a fluid system; applying negative pressure at the common refill/evacuation location to evacuate fluid through the inlet/outlet port; and, applying positive pressure at the common refill/evacuation location to refill at least one fluid through at least the portion of a fluid system.

[0017] Embodiments of a power supply system structured for use in association with a machine for which at least one fluid service operation is performed may also be provided in accordance with the present invention. Embodiments of the power supply system may include a power receptacle positioned within the vicinity of an inlet/outlet port of a fluid system of the machine; and, a power source supplying electrical power to the power receptacle, the power source being electrically operatively associated with a power source of the machine for which the fluid service operation is performed.

[0018] Embodiments of a connection / disconnection detection system structured for use in association with at least first and second coupling portions of a fluid system of a machine may be provided in accordance with the present invention. Embodiments of the detection system

may include a first electrical contact operatively associated with the first coupling portion; a second electrical contact operatively associated with the second coupling portion; and, a signal processor configured to receive electrical signals from the second electrical contact of the second coupling portion representative of association or disassociation of the first and second electrical contacts of the coupling portions.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[0019] Figure 1 is a side elevation view of one embodiment of a single-reservoir conduit system;

[0020] Figure 2 is a plan view of the embodiment shown in Figure 1 showing a coupling;

[0021] Figure 3 is a plan view of a pump integrally included in a flow control means;

[0022] Figure 4 is a side elevation of the embodiment shown in Figure 3;

[0023] Figure 5 and 6 are two views of one embodiment of a coupling for use with various embodiments of the present systems and methods;

[0024] Figure 7 is diagrammatic view of one embodiment of a conduit, and a coupling for oil purges;

[0025] Figure 8 is a diagrammatic view of one embodiment of a multiple-reservoir conduit system;

[0026] Figure 9 is an electrical schematic diagram for one embodiment of the system of Figure 8;

[0027] Figure 10 is an elevation view of one embodiment of a service panel for a fluid evacuation system;

[0028] Figure 11 is an electrical schematic for one embodiment of the system of Figure 10;

[0029] Figure 12 is a hydraulic schematic diagram of one embodiment of a fluid evacuation system;

[0030] Figure 13 is a diagrammatic view of one embodiment of a dual-pump multiple-reservoir conduit system;

[0031] Figure 14 is an electrical schematic diagram for one embodiment of the system of Figure 13;

[0032] Figure 15 is an elevation view of one embodiment of a control panel for a fluid evacuation system;

[0033] Figure 16 is an electrical diagram for one embodiment of the system of Figure 15;

[0034] Figure 17 is a hydraulic schematic diagram of one embodiment of a multiple pump fluid evacuation system;

[0035] Figure 18 is a schematic diagram showing one embodiment of a replacement fluid conduit system;

[0036] Figure 19 includes a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a fluid system configured for performing one or more fluid processes in accordance with the present systems and methods;

[0037] Figure 20 includes a schematic diagram displaying one embodiment of a control module and various embodiments of data devices configured for use in accordance with various embodiments of the present systems and methods;

[0038] Figure 21 includes a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of an internal data module configured for use in accordance with various embodiments of the present systems and methods;

[0039] Figure 22 includes a process flow diagram illustrating one method embodiment provided in accordance with the present systems and methods;

[0040] Figure 23 includes a schematic diagram of one system embodiment provided in accordance with the present systems and methods;

[0041] Figure 24 includes a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a fluid system configured for performing one or more fluid processes in accordance with the present systems and methods;

[0042] Figure 25A includes an exploded, isometric view of one illustrative embodiment of a junction block assembly structured for use in accordance with various embodiments of the present systems and methods;

[0043] Figure 25B includes an isometric view of the junction block assembly of Figure 23A;

[0044] Figure 25C includes a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a fluid system including a junction block assembly, a screen and a pump installed within the fluid system;

[0045] Figure 26 includes a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a fluid system configured for performing one or more fluid processes in accordance with the present systems and methods;

[0046] Figure 27 includes a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a fluid system configured for performing one or more fluid processes in accordance with the present systems and methods;

[0047] Figure 28 includes a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a fluid system configured for performing one or more fluid processes in accordance with the present systems and methods;

[0048] Figure 29 includes a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a fluid system configured for performing one or more fluid processes in accordance with the present systems and methods;

[0049] Figure 30 includes a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a fluid system configured for performing one or more fluid processes in accordance with the present systems and methods;

[0050] Figure 31 includes a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a fluid system configured for performing one or more fluid processes in accordance with the present systems and methods;

[0051] Figure 32 includes a schematic representation of a valve assembly structured in accordance with embodiments of the present systems and methods;

[0052] Figure 33 includes a schematic representation of a valve system structured in accordance with embodiments of the present systems and methods;

[0053] Figure 34 includes a schematic representation of a valve assembly structured in accordance with embodiments of the present systems and methods;

[0054] Figure 35 includes a schematic representation of a valve system provided in accordance with embodiments of the present systems and methods;

[0055] Figure 36 includes a schematic representation of an illustrative fluid system provided in accordance with various embodiments of the present systems and methods;

[0056] Figure 37 includes a flow chart illustrating various aspects of fluid operations that can be performed in accordance with the present systems and methods;

[0057] Figure 38 includes a schematic representation of a module of valve assemblies provided in accordance with the present systems and methods;

[0058] Figure 39 includes a schematic representation of an electronic valve module provided in accordance with various embodiments shown in Figure 38;

[0059] Figure 40 includes a schematic representation of a valve module provided in accordance with various embodiments of Figures 38 and 39;

[0060] Figure 41A through 41C illustrate various modes of operation for a schematically represented connection / disconnection detection system provided in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention; and,

[0061] Figure 42 includes a schematic representation of a power supply system provided in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION

[0062] The term “machine” as applied herein may include any equipment suitable for use in accordance with the present methods and systems. Examples of “machines” as applied herein can include, without limitation, a lubrication system, engines, diesel engines, large-scale diesel engines, motors, rotating equipment, generators, aircraft engines, emergency machines, emergency generators, compressors, equipment that includes a machine (e.g., such as mining equipment, construction equipment, marine equipment, aircraft, and the like), and other like machines. In various portions of the disclosure herein, the example of an “engine” is employed for convenience of disclosure in describing various embodiments and aspects of the present systems and methods. It can be appreciated by those skilled in the art, however, that such use of “engine” as one example of a type of machine is intended merely for said convenience of disclosure and is not intended to limit the scope of application of the present systems and methods.

[0063] The term “evacuation” as applied to the systems and methods disclosed herein may include evacuation of any portion of a fluid of a machine, a receptacle, a reservoir, or other like fluid-retaining system or apparatus. Similarly, the term “refill” as applied to the systems and

methods disclosed herein may include refill of any portion of the fluid capacity of a machine, receptacle, reservoir, or other like fluid-retaining system or apparatus.

[0064] The term “valve system” as applied to the systems and methods disclosed herein may include any combination of valves, pipes, disconnects, adapters and other like structural components configured for performing one or more fluid refill and/or fluid evacuation processes. Examples of valves included within a valve system may include, without limitation, single-position valves, multi-position valves (e.g., such as junction block assemblies or five-way control valves), and other types of valves with or without electronic control for actuating the various possible open/closed positions of such valves. The “multi-position valve” expression, as applied herein, can include a unitary valve mechanism (e.g., a single junction block assembly), or a reasonable combination of a unitary valve mechanism and other valve components.

[0065] Where suitable and applicable to the various embodiments of the present systems and methods discussed herein, it can be appreciated that various components, structures, elements, and other configurations may be applied or installed in a location considered external or internal to the operation of a particular machine. In applicable portions herein where the use of pumps and/or supplemental pumps is disclosed, for example, such pumps may be positioned, installed, or operated as internal components of a machine and/or as externally positioned components that assist, or otherwise operate in conjunction with, the functions of the machine.

[0066] As used herein, the term “subsequent” or variations thereof (e.g., “subsequently”) as used with respect to performance of process or method steps is not intended to exclude other potential process or method steps from occurring or being performed between steps that are considered “subsequent” with respect to each other. For example, as applied

herein, if step Y occurs “subsequent to” step X, then the intended meaning of “subsequent to” is that step Y occurs at some point in time after step X occurs, but other steps may occur in the time period that elapses between the occurrence of step X and step Y. In like fashion, the term “prior” or variations thereof (e.g., “prior to”) as used with respect to performance of process or method steps described herein is not intended to exclude other potential process or method steps from occurring or being performed between steps that are considered “prior to” with respect to each other.

[0067] As employed herein, the term “type” or “kind” used with regard to various fluids discussed herein is intended to distinguish different types or kinds of fluids between/among each other. For example, oil is considered one “type” of fluid, transmission fluid is considered another, different “type” of fluid, and hydraulic fluid is considered another, different “type” of fluid. It should be noted, for example, that a used amount of a “type” of fluid is not considered different with respect to a clean or fresh fluid of the same “type” (e.g., clean oil used in a fluid refill or replacement process for a machine is not considered a different “type” of fluid with respect to the used oil drained from the machine during a fluid evacuation process).

[0068] Referring now to Figures 1 and 2, a portable fluid transfer conduit 10 is shown having an inlet port 11 and outlet port 12. Flexibly extending between inlet and outlet ports 11 and 12 is flexible tubing 13. In various embodiments of the present systems and methods, the tubing 13 may be made from a natural or synthetic rubber material, braided stainless steel or polymeric extruded material such as polyethylene or styrene.

[0069] A coupling 14 is attached to the inlet 11. As shown, the coupling 14 is the male mateable end of a quick disconnect coupling more clearly shown in Figures 5 and 6.

Alternatively, coupling 14 can be any type of fitting such as a screw in or a bayonet type coupling. In one embodiment, a fitting is adapted to the outlet of the fluid source. On devices such as a pre-lubrication pump similar to that shown in U.S. Patent No. 4,502,431, for example, a bypass or connector means can be inserted on the pressure side of the pump to divert the oil from the engine to the fluid transfer conduit 10. An example is disclosed in the discussion of Figures 5 and 6 presented hereinbelow.

[0070] Positioned adjacent outlet port 12 is flow control means 16. Flow control means comprises, in one embodiment, an electric or mechanical valve for controlling the flow of fluid through the conduit activated by switch 17. This embodiment is useful where the fluid source does not incorporate a pump means and/or the fluid is gravity transferred. On the other hand, in the case where means such as a pre-lubrication device is used, flow control means 16 is preferably a pass through conduit having switch 17 sealably mounted thereon. Switch 17 is electrically connected by conductor 18 to electrical connector 19, which is adapted to connect with the pump circuit to activate the pump and control the flow of fluid. Where flow control means 16 comprises an electric valve, conductor 18 and connector 19 are typically connected to a source of electrical power such as a battery terminal, a magnetic switch, relay contacts or other electromechanical means for activating the pumping means.

[0071] To drain a fluid such as oil or hydraulic oil, for example, from a machine or other piece of equipment involves connecting coupling 14 to the outlet of the pump and initiating the pump through activation of flow control switch 17 or by use of gravity. It can be appreciated that in situations where a pre-lubrication pump is used, a valve is not usually required. The outlet port of fluid transfer conduit 10 is positioned at a remote and convenient location to

discharge the fluid into a waste-receiving receptacle. Such waste-receiving receptacles are generally known in the art and may commonly comprise barrels or service vehicles, for example, or other receptacles or reservoirs adapted to receive and transport waste oil or other contaminated vehicle fluids.

[0072] In one embodiment shown in Figures 3 and 4, fluid transfer conduit 20 comprises a conduit 23 having an inlet port 21 and an outlet port 22. Inlet port 21 includes a coupling 24, preferably a mateable coupling as shown in Figures 5 and 6. In this operational example, flow control means 26 comprises a small suction, diaphragm, piston or reciprocating pump 28 and may include therein a battery pack. Flow control means 16 includes an activator switch 27 in the form of a "trigger switch" having a guard 29 and grip means 31 to facilitate holding the discharge end of the fluid transfer conduit 20. It can be appreciated that in applications where a relatively long transfer conduit is applied such as, for example, a transfer conduit of 20 to 30 feet in length, the pump 28 can be located adjacent to, or in close proximity to, the coupling means 14.

[0073] Many types of small portable pumps suitable for use as the pump 28 are commercially available. A number of pumps are better suited for heavier or more viscous fluids but are not capable of operating with battery power. In such cases, a power cable such as conductor 18 and connector 19 can be used in addition to the various embodiments described herein. Typically, the electrical power required to operate the pump 28 can be supplied by a vehicle storage battery or an AC pump can be connected to an AC outlet as a power source. In general, smaller pump means are suitable and applicable in the consumer market, and the comparatively larger pump means are applicable to the industrial market.

[0074] Referring now to Figures 5 and 6, examples of coupling means 14,41 for use with various embodiments of the present systems and methods are shown. Coupling means 14,41 are adaptable, for example, to fluid transfer conduit embodiments shown with respect to Figure 1 and Figure 3. Coupling means 41 connects to the engine oil port (not shown), whereas coupling means 14 is attached to conduit 10. Such coupling means are well known in the art and comprise a male quick connector fitting 30 and a female mateable quick connector fitting 32. Also shown is an electrical receptor 33 for receiving electrical connector 19. In various embodiments, it is also possible to include a sensing means on the coupling means 14,41 to indicate that the sump is dry and to signal for shut down of the pump. A cap 34 is shown for protecting receptor 33 between periods of use. As shown in the embodiments of Figures 5 and 6, receptor 33 and fitting 32 are mounted on a bracket 36 that is connected to a source of fluid 37, such as a pre-lubrication pump, for example (not shown). In this embodiment, the fitting 32 is connected on the output or high-pressure side of the fluid source system. In application to a pre-lubrication system, for example, the fitting 32 is interposed in the high-pressure pump discharge line between the pump and an engine or other machine.

[0075] Referring now to Figure 6, one embodiment of a sampling port 39 is shown that can be used to sample oil in a pre-lubrication system where the pre-lubrication pumps flows through portion 37. It can be appreciated that this embodiment has the advantage of being able to provide a live sample of oil, or other fluid used in this embodiment, without requiring the engine or other machine to be in a fully operational state.

[0076] As shown in the illustrative embodiment of Figure 7, an additional fitting 40 is attached to an external air supply 42. In one aspect, the fitting 40 is a female fitting adapted to

couple to an air supply (not shown). By attaching an air source to the fitting 40 prior to or during the removal of oil from the engine, oil resident in the channels can be removed to the sump and the oil in the filter system can be at least partially or substantially removed to facilitate removal of the filter. In many embodiments that employ such an air supply, it may be desirable to have the source of air at a pressure from about 90 to 150 pounds per square inch, for example.

[0077] It has been discovered that a vehicle or other equipment having, for example, an engine reservoir 105, hydraulic fluid reservoir 107 and a transmission fluid reservoir 109, may be more efficiently serviced and risks of environmental contamination may be reduced, if the various service locations for such reservoirs are in relatively close proximity. For example, and without limitation, if the service locations for such reservoirs are within about 3 to 10 feet from each other, service can usually be accomplished by relatively few technicians and within an acceptable amount of time. Also, the risks from environmental contamination caused, for example, by spillage when several lines and fluid containers are disconnected and connected, can be reduced if such close proximity of service locations is provided.

[0078] Figure 8 illustrates one embodiment for a single-pump multiple reservoir conduit system 100, which may be used, for example, to evacuate the engine reservoir 105, the hydraulic reservoir 107 and the transmission or other fluid reservoir 109 of a machine through a quick connect port 112 that may be mounted on a bracket 173 or to an evacuation port 153 in a control panel 150 (see discussion hereinbelow). A pump 128, and each of the reservoirs 105, 107 and 109 are connected to a control valve 116 through a network of conduits 113. In one embodiment, the pump 128 may be a dedicated evacuation pump, for example, or may be an engine pre-lubrication pump, for example. The network of conduits includes a first conduit 400

connected to the hydraulic reservoir 107 at a first end 402 by a first coupling 406, and to the control valve 116 at a second end 404 by a second coupling 408. Similarly, a second conduit 410 is connected at a first end 414 to the engine reservoir 105 by a first coupling 416, and to the control valve 116 at a second end 412 by a second coupling 418. A third conduit 420 is connected at a first end 422 to the transmission reservoir 109 by a first coupling 426, and to the control valve 116 at a second end 424 by a second coupling 428. A fourth conduit 430 is connected to the pump 128 at a first end 432 by a first coupling 436 and to the outlet port 112 at a second end 434 by a second coupling 438. A fifth conduit 461 is connected to the pump 128 at a first end 463 by a first coupling 467 and to the control valve 116 at a second end 465 by a second coupling 469.

[0079] In one example embodiment, the control valve 116 is a three-position, four-port directional valve, which controls the connection of the pump 128 with each of the conduits 410, 400 and 420 leading to the reservoirs 105, 107 and 109, respectively. In one aspect, the control valve 116 has one default position, which is the engine sump 105 position. The control valve 116 and the pump 128 may be operated from a remote bracket 173 by an electrical evacuator switch attached to a connector 172, and a toggle selector switch 174, respectively.

[0080] As will be appreciated, in the operation of the system of Figure 8, the control valve 116 determines which of the reservoirs 105, 107 or 109 will be in fluid communication with the pump 128 through the conduit network 113. Specifically, the selector switch 174 determines the position of the control valve 116. The switch connected at the connector 172 serves as the on-off switch for the pump 128, and may be mounted on the bracket 173 or may be mounted on a tethered switch connected to connector 172. In operation, the selector switch 174

controls the position of the control valve 116 to determine which reservoir 105, 107 or 109 is evacuated. When the switch connected to connector 172 is energized, the pump 128 is energized, thereby providing negative pressure on line 461 and, in turn, to the control valve 116. The fluid in the reservoir 105, 107 or 109 fluidly coupled to the control valve 116 is drawn into line 461, through pump 128, through line 430 and to coupling 112 for discharge into a suitable receptacle and/or into a fluid line for further processing.

[0081] Figure 9 shows one illustrative embodiment of the electrical circuitry for the embodiment of the single-pump, multiple reservoir system of Figure 8. A relay switch 158 is connected to the motor 162 of the pump 128 to start and stop the pump motor 162 when the start switch 172 is activated to provide power from a direct current source, for example, or other suitable power source. In one aspect, the relay switch 158 stops the motor when a low flow condition is detected in any of the conduits 400, 410, and 420 during evacuation by the sensor 180. The control valve 116 is electrically operated through two solenoids 164 and 166 connected to a selector switch 174. The selector switch 174 is also connected to the start switch 172. In one embodiment, the start switch 172 includes a single-pole, normally open switch, and the selector switch 174 includes a single-pole double-throw switch.

[0082] Although three reservoirs are shown in the embodiment illustrated in Figure 8, the number of reservoirs is not limited to three. For embodiments with N reservoirs, for example, there are N reservoir conduits connecting each reservoir with the control valve, such as the conduits 400, 410 and 420 of Figure 8. A pump conduit, such as conduit 461, for example, connects the control valve 116 to the pump 128, and an outlet conduit, such as conduit 430, for

example, connects the pump 128 to the outlet port 112. It can be appreciated that, for N reservoirs, the control valve 116 has one default position and N-1 selector activated positions.

[0083] The control valve 116 may also be operated from a centralized location, such as a service panel. An embodiment of a remote single service panel 150 for a single pump, which includes switches for the actuation of the pump 128 and the control valve 116 in addition to switches for ignition and ports for sampling engine, transmission and hydraulic fluids, is shown in Figure 10. A selector switch 152 on the service panel 150 is connected to the control valve 116 to enable an operator to select the reservoir to be evacuated. A switch for controlling evacuation 154, an emergency evacuation stop switch 156, and an evacuation connect port 153 (coupled, for example, to the line 430) for connecting/disconnecting the pump 128 may also be mounted on the service panel 150. Additionally, a transmission oil sampling port 50, an engine oil sampling port 52, and a hydraulic oil sampling port 54 may be mounted on the service panel 150 for with the transmission, engine and hydraulic reservoirs respectively. The service panel 150 may also include an oil filter 56 having an oil inlet line 44, transmission oil filter, a fuel filter 58, a fuel separator 60, hydraulic oil filter, a remote ignition selector 62 and an ignition switch 64. Thus, service locations, such as control panel 150, may be provided for virtually all machine, vehicle, and/or engine fluid service needs.

[0084] An embodiment of the electrical diagram for the service panel of Figure 10 is shown in Figure 11. A motor relay 76 is connected to the pump motor 80 connected to pump 128 to start and stop the pump motor 80 when the start 154 and emergency stop 156 switches, respectively, are operated. The relay switch 76 stops the motor when a low flow condition is detected by sensor 69 during evacuation. The evacuation selector switch 152, which is

electrically connected to the start switch 154 and to the emergency stop switch 156, enables the selective evacuation of the hydraulic reservoir 107 or transmission reservoir 109 through the operation of a hydraulic reservoir solenoid valve coil 65 and a transmission reservoir solenoid valve coil 67, respectively. The default position in Figure 11 is the evacuation of the engine reservoir 105, but it will be appreciated that any of the reservoirs may be chosen as the default position, and that the number of reservoirs may not be limited to three.

[0085] As shown in Figure 12, each of the lines 410, 420 and 400 may also be coupled to a corresponding check valve 170, 170' or 170'', respectively, to allow flow in one direction only as well as a check valve 170''' around pump 128. Optionally, a line 439 (shown in dotted lines) may be provided with appropriate valving around the pump 128, which is connected to a quick disconnect coupling 440. In this embodiment, the truck pump 160 of a lubrication evacuation truck may be used to evacuate fluids. The truck pump 160 evacuates through permanent line 472 or quick disconnect line 474 to a truck waste tank 470. If pump 128 is used and the truck pump 160 is not used, a conduit 460 may be connected by application of appropriate valving through the permanent line 472 or the quick disconnect 474 to the lubrication truck waste tank 470.

[0086] Figures 13 through 17 illustrate embodiments for a dual-pump multiple reservoir conduit system 200 including a first pump 230 in fluid communication with an engine reservoir 505, and a second pump 228 in fluid communication with a hydraulic reservoir 507 and a transmission reservoir 509. However, it will be appreciated that more pumps may be used or the pumps may be connected to different reservoirs within the spirit and scope of the invention. In this embodiment, the first pump 230 evacuates the engine oil through a first outlet port 312

operated with an electrical switch connected to a connector 372 on a remote bracket 373 or mounted on a service panel 250. A first conduit 520 is connected to the engine reservoir 505 at a first end 522 by a first coupling 524, and to the first pump 230 at a second end 526 by a second coupling 528. A second conduit 530 is connected at a first end 532 to the first pump 230 by a first coupling 534, and to the first outlet port 312 at a second end 536 by a second coupling 538. The outlet port 312 may be connected to a conduit to provide for pre-lubrication of the engine. Alternatively, the second conduit 530 may also be fluidically connected to a coupling 251 in a control panel 250, discussed below. The second pump 228 is connected to a control valve 616 and evacuates fluid from the transmission reservoir 509 or the hydraulic reservoir 407 to a second outlet port 212 by operating the selector switch 274 and an evacuation switch connected to connector 272 which, together with the outlet port 212, may be mounted on a second bracket 273. The second pump 228 and each of the reservoirs 507, 509 are connected to a control valve 616 through of a network of conduits 513. The network of conduits 513 includes a first network conduit 540, which is connected at a first end 542 to the hydraulic reservoir 507 by a first coupling 546, and to the control valve 616 at a second end 544 by a second coupling 548. A second network conduit 550 is connected at a first end 554 to the transmission reservoir 509 by a first coupling 558, and to the valve 616 at a second end 552 by a second coupling 556. A third network conduit 580 is connected to the pump 228 at a first end 582 by a first coupling 586 and to the outlet port 212 at a second end 584 by a second quick coupling 588. Alternatively, the conduit 580 may be fluidically connected to a coupling 253 on the control panel 250. A fourth network conduit 590 is connected to the second pump 228 at a first end 592 by a first coupling 596 and to the control valve 616 at a second end 594 by a second quick coupling 598. A flexible

conduit 315 may be used connect the outlet ports 312 or 212 to a waste oil container or to a port of a lubrication truck leading to a waste oil tank 570 on the lube truck, as shown in Figure 17. The control valve 616 provides for the selective evacuation of the transmission 509 or hydraulic reservoir 507.

[0087] Figure 14 illustrates an electrical diagram for an embodiment of a dual-pump multiple reservoir evacuation system illustrated in Figure 13. Each pump motor 263 and 262 is connected to a corresponding relay switch 258 and 259, and each relay switch is powered, for example, by a portable source of 12V or 24V DC current. First and second motor relay switches 258, 259 are connected to a first and second normally open start switches 372 and 272. Between each relay and the corresponding start switch, low flow sensors 280 and 281, respectively, may be activated to intervene and stop the corresponding motor when a low flow condition is detected. A source of electric current is connected to the second relay switch 259, to the selector switch 274 and to the start switch 372 and 272. A two-position control valve 216 controls flow to the hydraulic reservoir 507 and the transmission reservoir 509, and is shown with a hydraulic reservoir as the default position, although any of the reservoirs may be the default reservoir.

[0088] It will be appreciated that the number of conduits connected to the first and second pumps need not be limited to a total of three. For example, the first pump 230 may be connected to N_1 reservoirs and the second pump 228 may be connected to N_2 reservoirs for a total number of $N = N_1 + N_2$. Figure 13 illustrates a first example of an embodiment where N_1 is equal to 1 and N_2 is equal to 2. In a second example of the same embodiment, N_1 is still equal to 1, but N_2 is a number greater than 2. In the second example, the control valve 616 is connected to N_2 reservoir conduits, such as conduits 540 and 550. In both examples, the second pump is

connected to the control valve 616 with pump conduit 590, and to the second outlet 212 with outlet conduit 580.

[0089] An embodiment for a remote service panel 250 including controls for a dual-pump multiple reservoir evacuation system is shown in Figure 15. It includes start 254 and stop 256 switches, a selector switch 252 and evacuation disconnect ports 251, 253 for the first pump 230 and second pump 228. A line 900 connected to the unfiltered side of the engine oil filter head may also be connected to a pressure-regulated air supply to purge the engine of used oil before adding replacement oil through the same port. On the same service panel sample ports 910, 912, 914 for the transmission, engine and hydraulic fluid reservoirs respectively may be mounted, as well as a remote ignition selector 918 and a remote ignition switch 916.

[0090] An embodiment of an electrical diagram for the panel of Figure 15 is shown in Figure 16. The pump motors 963 and 962 for the pumps 230 and 228, respectively, are connected to corresponding relay switches 958 and 959, respectively, and each relay switch is powered, for example, by a source of 12V or 24V DC current. The first and second motor relay switches 958, 959 are connected to the selector switch 252 and a normally closed emergency stop switch 256. Between each relay and the emergency stop switch 256, low flow sensors 280 and 281, respectively, intervene to stop the respective motor when a low flow condition is detected. The selector switch 252 is connected to a valve coil 966 and a normally open start switch 254. In Figure 16, electrical wiring for the transmission reservoir is depicted in the selector switch 254, corresponding to contact points including the letter "T" designation. For clarity of disclosure, some wiring for the hydraulic and engine reservoirs, corresponding to contact points "H" and "E" of the selector switch 966, has been omitted.

[0091] Figure 17 illustrates a hydraulic diagram for an embodiment of a dual-pump multiple reservoir evacuation system. The first and second pumps 230 and 228 evacuate fluid from each of the selected reservoirs to ports 312 and 212, which may be mounted on brackets 373 and 273, respectively, or to the connectors 251 and 253 on the control panel 250. The flow from each reservoir 505, 507 and 509 may be controlled in one-way direction by check valves downstream from each reservoir. Check valves 705, 707 and 709 are connected downstream from the engine reservoir 505, the hydraulic reservoir 507 and the transmission reservoir 509 respectively. Check valves 720 and 722 are also mounted on bypass pipes 711 and 712, respectively, bypassing the first pump 230 and the second pump 228, respectively. A control valve 216, controls flow to the transmission reservoir 509 and to the hydraulic reservoir 507, and is shown with default position to the hydraulic reservoir 507. The discharge from bracket couplings 212 and 312 or control panel connectors 251 and 253 may be coupled to a discharge container or to a conduit 315 mounted on a lube truck. In that case, evacuated fluid passes through properly valved line 360 around lube truck pump 160 and directly into reservoir 570. Alternatively, it will be appreciated that the pumps 230 and 228 may be bypassed by lines 574 and 576, respectively, and appropriate valving provided in order that evacuation suction may be provided by the pump 160 on the lube truck. That discharge may then pass directly to the lube truck reservoir 570 via, for example, a fixed line 372, a quick connection line 374, a flexible conduit, or another suitable fluid system configuration.

[0092] Either single-pump multiple reservoir system (as described in connection with Figures 8 through 12) or the dual-pump multiple reservoir systems (as described in connection with Figures 13 through 17) may be used to remove fluid from any of the reservoirs on a

machine or vehicle, by attaching evacuation conduits to the reservoirs as shown in the respective figures, operating the control valve to select a reservoir and actuating the pump to pump fluid from the selected reservoir to an outlet port for discharge. Additionally, after draining a selected reservoir, replacement fluid may be admitted into the appropriate cavity as shown schematically in Figure 18, by attaching to a conduit 972 connected to the unfiltered side of the fluid system (e.g., to the cavity's filter head 970), and a replacement fluid conduit 974, by means of a coupling 976. The coupling 976 is connected to a replacement fluid source 978. For example, engine oil can be input into line 44 in the embodiment in Figure 10 or into line 900 in the embodiment in Figure 15, in each case before the oil filter head. It can be appreciated that the fluid cavities corresponding to the other reservoirs discussed herein can also be refilled by inputting replacement fluid on the unfiltered side of the respective filters of such fluid cavities.

[0093] Referring now to Figure 19, one embodiment of a fluid system 1001 including a machine (wherein the machine in this example embodiment is an engine 1002) connected to a pump 1004 is shown. In one aspect of this embodiment, the pump 1004 may be a supplemental pump or engine pre-lubrication pump, for example, and/or may be installed and operated at a local location or a remote location with respect to the position and operation of the engine 1002. The pump 1004 is configured for fluid communication and operation in association with an evacuation bracket 1006. Based on the mode of operation of the engine 1002, a fluid circuit may be completed or interrupted by a quick disconnect 1008. During a fluid evacuation procedure, for example, the evacuation bracket 1006 can be used, in association with the operation of the pump 1004, to evacuate various fluids from the engine 1002. In addition, in the embodiment of Figure 19 and in various embodiments of the present systems and methods described herein, a

control module 1100 can be operatively associated with various components of the fluid system 1001. Also, an internal data module 1200 can be operatively associated with the engine 1002 for receiving, storing and/or processing data related to functions performed within the fluid system 1001. In another aspect, a supplemental filter system 1010 may be operatively installed in association with the evacuation bracket 1006 and the quick disconnect 1008, for example. In various aspects of the present systems and methods, the supplemental filter system 1010 may be, for example, a fine filtration system as that term is understood in the art.

[0094] Referring now to Figure 20, in one illustrative embodiment, the control module 1100 includes various components for controlling and monitoring a fluid system, as well as for monitoring, collecting and analyzing data associated with various fluid system and method embodiments described herein. The control module 1100 includes a processor 1102 for executing various commands within, and directing the function of, the various components of the control module 1100. One or more sensor inputs 1104 can be provided in the control module 1100 for receiving and processing data communicated from one or more sensors 1105 installed within a fluid system. Sensors 1105 applicable to operation of a machine can include, without limitation, sensors to detect temperature, sensors to detect pressure, sensors to detect voltage, sensors to detect current, sensors to detect contaminants, sensors to detect cycle time, flow sensors and/or other sensors suitable for detecting various conditions experienced by the machine during the various stages of operation of the machine. In addition, one or more indicators 1106 can be provided within the control module 1100 for providing alerts or notifications of conditions detected and communicated to the control module 1100. Such indicators 1106 can be conventional audio, visual, or audiovisual indications of a condition detected within a fluid

system. The control module 1100 may also include one or more data storage media 1108 for storing, retrieving and/or reporting data communicated to the control module 1100. Data stored within the data storage media 1108 may include a variety of data collected from the condition of the fluid system including, for example and without limitation, oil condition, particle count of contaminants, cycle time data for time to evacuate or time to refill a given reservoir, fluid receptacle or other fluid storage/retention medium.

[0095] The control module 1100 further includes one or more controls 1110 for permitting manipulation of various elements of a fluid system and/or for receiving and processing data communicated from a fluid system. Machine controls 1110A can be provided for controlling various aspects of an engine, for example, such as ignition, pre-lubrication operations, initiating a fluid evacuation process, initiating a fluid refill process, and various other machine operations. Pump controls 1110B can be provided for controlling the action of a pump or supplemental pump operatively associated with a fluid system, such as the fluid system of a machine, for example. One or more valve controls 1110C can be provided to actuate the position (e.g., open, closed, or other position) of one or more valves included within a fluid system. In addition, one or more multi-position valve controls 1110D can be provided to operate a multi-way valve (e.g., a five-way valve), or another multi-position valve apparatus or system such as a junction block assembly, for example (described hereinafter). In addition, evacuation bracket controls 1110E can be provided for the particular function of one or more evacuation brackets included within, or introduced into, a fluid system.

[0096] It can be appreciated that any portion of the above-described controls 1110 may be manually actuated by a machine operator, for example, or automatically actuated as part

of execution of instructions stored on a computer-readable medium, for example. In one illustrative example, the pump controls 1110B may be operatively associated automatically with manual actuation of the machine controls 1110A, such as in the event of a pre-lubrication process initiated during ignition of an engine, for example.

[0097] In addition, in various embodiments described herein, it can be appreciated that the controls 1110 need not be located within the same location such as included within the same service panel, for example, or other like centralized location. It can be further appreciated that the controls 1110 may be operatively associated with a machine, a fluid system, a valve system, or other component of the present embodiments by one or more wireline and/or wireless communication methods or systems. Thus, in various embodiments described herein, it can be seen that the controls 1110 may be considered clustered for a particular application of the present embodiments while not necessarily being physically located in a single, centralized location such as installed on a service panel, for example.

[0098] Data can be communicated to the control module 1100 to and/or from a fluid system through a variety of methods and systems. In various embodiments disclosed herein, data may be communicated, for example, by a wireline connection, communicated by satellite communications, cellular communications, infrared and/or communicated in accordance with a protocol such as IEEE 802.11, for example, or other wireless or radio frequency communication protocol among other similar types of communication methods and systems. As shown in Figure 20, one or more data devices 1150 can be employed in operative association with the control module 1100 for the purpose of receiving, processing, inputting and/or storing data and/or for cooperating with the control module 1100 to control, monitor or otherwise manipulate one or

more components included within a fluid system. Examples of data devices 1150 include, for example and without limitation, personal computers 1150A, laptops 1150B, and personal digital assistants (PDA's) 1150C, and other data devices suitable for executing instructions on one or more computer-readable media.

[0099] Various types of sensors 1105 can be employed in various embodiments of the present systems and methods to detect one or more conditions of a fluid system. For example, the sensors 1105 can detect one or more of the following conditions within a fluid system: engine oil pressure, oil temperature in the engine, amount of current drawn by a pre-lubrication circuit, presence of contaminants (such as oil contaminants, for example) in the engine, amount of time that has elapsed for performance of one or more cycles of various engine operations (i.e., cycle time) such as pre-lubrication operations, fluid evacuation operations, fluid refill operations, fluid flow rates, and others. One example of a sensor 1105 that may be used in accordance with various embodiments of the present systems and methods is a contamination sensor marketed under the "LUBRIGARD" trade designation (Lubrigard Limited, United Kingdom, North America, Europe). A contamination sensor can provide information regarding oxidation products, water, glycol, metallic wear particles, and/or other contaminants that may be present in the engine oil, hydraulic oil, gearbox oil, transmission oil, compressor oil and/or other fluids used in various machines. In various aspects of the present methods and systems, the contamination sensor may be employed during one or more fluid processes, for example, such as a fluid evacuation process or a fluid refill process.

[0100] It can be appreciated that the control module 1100 can receive and store data associated with activation and deactivation of various components of a fluid system and

operation of a machine, such as an engine, for example, included within the fluid system. Cycle time, for example, can be calculated from analysis of collected data to provide an indication of elapsed time for completing evacuation and/or refill operations. For a given oil temperature or temperature range (e.g., as can be detected and communicated by a temperature sensor), an average cycle time, for example, can be calculated through analysis of two or more collected cycle times. In one aspect, the present methods and systems can determine whether the most recently elapsed cycle time deviates from a nominal average cycle time, or range of cycle times, for a given oil temperature or temperature range. In addition, factors may be known such as the type and viscosity of fluids (e.g., such as oil) used in connection with operation of the machine. An unacceptable deviation from a nominal cycle time, or range of times, can result in recording a fault in a data storage medium 1108 of the control module 1100. It can be appreciated that many other types of fault conditions may be detected, analyzed and recorded in connection with practice of the present systems and methods. In other illustrative examples, conditions associated with battery voltage, current, and/or the presence of contaminants in the machine, for example, may be detected, analyzed, and one or more fault conditions recorded by the control module 1100.

[0101] Referring now to Figure 21, in various embodiments of the present methods and systems, data collected from fluid system operation can be stored on an internal data module 1200 installed on or near a machine. The internal data module 1200 can include a processor 1202 with an operatively associated memory 1204. In one aspect, the internal data module 1200 can be a “one-shot” circuit, as that term is understood by those skilled in the art. The internal data module 1200 can be configured to receive and store data related to various conditions of a fluid system, a machine, a valve, a pump, or other components of a fluid system. In one

embodiment, the internal data module 1200 can store data in the memory 1204 prior to engine ignition and then transfer the stored data to the control module 1100, for example, or another computer system, once engine ignition is initiated. In another embodiment, the internal data module 1200 can store condition data for subsequent download to the control module 1100 or another suitable computer system. In various embodiments, the internal data module 1200 can be configured for use in performing data collection and storage functions when the control module 1100 is not otherwise active (e.g., during various machine service operations). In this manner, the internal data module 1200 can be employed to store data corresponding to the electrical events associated with an oil change, for example, or another type of fluid evacuation or refill procedure and can transmit data related to the procedure to the control module 1100. In various embodiments, the internal data module 1200 can be a stand-alone, discrete module, or can be configured for full or partial integration into the operation of the control module 1100.

[0102] Collected and analyzed data, as well as recorded fault events, can be stored in association with the control module 1100, the internal data module 1200, and/or at a remote location. In various embodiments of the present methods and systems, the control module 1100 and/or the internal data module 1200 can be configured for operation as integral components of a machine or as remote components not installed locally on the machine. The collected and analyzed information can be stored in one or more of the data storage media 1108 of the control module 1100, or on another conventional storage suitable for use in connection with the control module 1100. The information can also be stored externally with respect to a machine and its components. As shown in Figure 20, data can be transmitted wirelessly by a radio frequency communication or by a wireline connection from the control module 1100 to one or more data

devices 1150. The personal digital assistant 1150C, for example, may be configured and employed as a computer system for receiving and processing data collected from the control module 1100 during fluid evacuation and fluid refill processes.

[0103] In one illustrative example, information related to an oil change event, such as the time duration of the oil change, for example, and other engine conditions can be recorded and processed in connection with operation of the control module 1100 and/or the internal data module 1200 and/or their operatively associated storage medium or media. The date and time of the oil change event, for example, can also be recorded for one or more such oil changes. Analysis of the data may assume that a substantially constant volume of oil at a given temperature evacuates from, or refills into, the engine lubrication system in a consistent and repeatable amount of time. A calculation can be made that considers the amount of time needed for an oil change at a given temperature (as detected by an oil temperature sensor, for example), and other factors such as the type and viscosity of the oil. Using this calculation, the amount of oil evacuated from, or refilled into, the engine can be calculated. While the example of an engine is employed herein, it can be appreciated that the principles of the present methods and systems described herein can be readily applied, for example, to hydraulic fluid reservoirs, transmission fluid reservoirs, and a variety of other types of fluid reservoirs. The calculated evacuated/refilled oil amount can be compared against a nominal value for the sump capacity. If the calculated amount is greater than or less than the nominal value or tolerance range for such calculations, this information can be recorded as a fault for further investigation and/or maintenance. In one embodiment, the fault recorded can be recorded electronically, such as in association with operation of the control module 1100. One or more notifications can be

generated for an operator of the engine by use of the indicators 1106, for example, to advise the operator that a fault has been recorded by the system. In application to various embodiments described herein, the notification can take the form of an audible signal, a visual or text signal, or some reasonable combination of such signals.

[0104] Referring now to Figure 22, one embodiment of a method for performing multiple fluid evacuation and refill processes is shown. In step 1222, a need for a fluid change is identified, such as a fluid change in the fluid reservoir of a machine, for example. Identification of fluid change needs/desires and subsequent functions performed in the fluid system can be controlled in connection with a control module (in accordance with the above discussion). In step 1224, the configuration of a valve system included within a fluid system can be adjusted to permit a fluid evacuation process to be performed in operative association with the identified fluid reservoir. It can be appreciated that adjustments to configuration of the valve system performed in step 1224 can be facilitated in an automated manner such as by operative association of the fluid system with the control module 1100, for example, by a manual operator adjustment, or some reasonable combination of automated and manual processes. The identified fluid reservoir is evacuated in step 1226. In optional step 1227, which can be performed prior to the evacuation process of step 1226, a conventional purge procedure can be performed on a fluid system associated with the reservoir to remove waste fluids, to resist spillage of fluids, to resist environmental contamination potentially caused by waste fluids, and/or to promote safety of an operator, for example, or other personnel by resisting contact between waste fluids (and potentially harmful components of waste fluids) and the operator. In one aspect, the purge procedure of step 1227 can be performed prior to performance of a subsequent fluid refill

process, for example, for the reservoir. In one illustrative embodiment, the purge procedure can include an air purge procedure, for example. In step 1228 the valve system can be configured to permit a fluid refill process to be performed in connection with the identified fluid reservoir. In step 1230, a fluid replacement source is accessed, and the identified fluid reservoir is refilled in step 1232. In one aspect of the present methods and systems, it can be appreciated that the refill procedure of step 1232 can be performed by delivering the refill fluid pre-filter with respect to the identified fluid reservoir.

[0105] In step 1234, a determination is made as to whether an additional fluid change process is required or desired. If it is determined that an additional reservoir does require a fluid change, then the valve system is configured in step 1236 to permit a fluid evacuation process to occur for the additionally identified reservoir, which additionally identified reservoir can include a fluid which is similar or dissimilar with respect to the fluid of the first identified reservoir. It can be appreciated that adjustments to the valve system performed in step 1236 can be facilitated in an automated manner such as by operative association of the fluid system with the control module 1100, for example, by a manual operator adjustment, or some reasonable combination of automated and manual processes. In step 1238, fluid within the additional reservoir is evacuated. In optional step 1227 (also described above), which can be performed prior to the evacuation process of step 1238, a conventional purge procedure can be performed on a fluid system associated with the reservoir to remove waste fluids, to resist spillage of fluids, to resist environmental contamination potentially caused by waste fluids, and/or to promote safety of an operator, for example, or other personnel by resisting contact between waste fluids (and potentially harmful components of waste fluids) and the operator. In one aspect, the purge

procedure of step 1227 can be performed prior to performance of a subsequent fluid refill process, for example, for the reservoir. In step 1240, the valve system can be configured to permit a fluid refill process for the additional reservoir. In step 1242, a fluid replacement source is accessed, and the additional reservoir is refilled with fluid in step 1244 to the unfiltered side of the fluid system. In one aspect of the present methods and systems, it can be appreciated that the refill procedure of step 1244 can be performed by delivering the refill fluid pre-filter with respect to the additional reservoir. The process can then return to step 1234 to identify additional reservoirs for which fluid changes may be needed or desired. It can be seen that the method shown in Figure 22 permits multiple fluids to be evacuated and/or refilled for multiple reservoirs associated with a machine, from potentially multiple fluid replacement sources or reservoirs, in an automated or substantially automated manner.

[0106] In various embodiments of the present methods and systems, data can be collected, stored and/or analyzed for multiple reservoirs connected with, or operatively associated with, a machine. Referring again to Figure 22, a control module or other data device (as described hereinabove), for example, can be employed in step 1248 to collect data 1248A, store data 1248B, and/or analyze data 1248C in accordance with one or more of the process steps shown in Figure 22, as well as other steps performed in connection with operation and/or maintenance functions of a machine. In one example aspect, it can be seen that the control module can be applied in step 1248 to collect and analyze time-stamp information associated with an event such as an evacuation/refill process performed in connection with an oil reservoir, for example. In other aspects of the present methods and systems, it can be appreciated that many types of data can be collected, analyzed, and/or stored in connection with the function of

multiple reservoirs. Data such as current valve position, valve type, and/or reservoir type, for example, can be collected in connection with performance of an evacuation/refill procedure for a first reservoir. A further evacuation/refill procedure, or another process step, can then be initiated for the first reservoir or for an additionally identified reservoir. Likewise, data such as current valve position, valve type, reservoir type, for example, can be collected in association with the evacuation/refill procedure for the additionally identified reservoir, for example, or another process step.

[0107] Referring now to Figure 23, one embodiment of a system for performing multiple fluid evacuation and fluid refill processes is shown in schematic form. A first junction block assembly 1252 having a plurality of ports (represented by positions A,B,C,D,E and F) is connected through conventional piping or hydraulic hoses, for example, to the suction side 1254 of a pump 1256. A second junction block assembly 1258 having a plurality of ports (represented by positions G,H,I,J,K and L) is also connected through conventional piping or hydraulic hoses, for example, to the pressure side 1260 of the pump 1256. In one aspect, the system may include a disconnect 1262, such as a quick disconnect and bracket assembly, for example, in the piping. In various aspects of the system, a control module 1100 can be operatively associated with various control, sensing, and monitoring functions performed in association with operation of the system. It can be appreciated that the junction block assemblies 1252,1258 are shown merely for purposes of illustration. One or both of the junction block assemblies 1252,1258 could be replaced with other multi-position valves, for example, or other suitable types of valves. It can be further appreciated that the system shown in Figure 23 can be configured to perform multiple

fluid refill and/or fluid evacuation processes in connection with one or more machine reservoirs, one or more fluid replacement sources, and/or one or more waste-receiving receptacles.

[0108] In one operational example of the valve system of Figure 23 (which valve system includes the first and second junction block assemblies 1252,1258), ports D and G can be connected through piping to a machine 1251 such as a machine engine, for example. Port E can be configured to be a refill port that permits fluid to be introduced to the valve system such as from a fluid replacement source, for example. Port K can be configured as an evacuation port that permits fluid to be evacuated through the second junction block assembly 1258 from the machine 1251, which evacuation may be facilitated by a quick disconnect and bracket assembly, for example. Port A is in fluid communication with the pump 1256 on the suction side 1254 of the pump 1256, and Port J is in fluid communication with the pump 1256 on the pressure side 1260 of the pump 1256.

[0109] In a first configuration of the illustrative valve system of Figure 23, all ports of the first junction block assembly 1252 are closed except for port A, which is in communication with the suction side 1254 of the pump 1256, and port D, which is in an open position and in communication with the machine 1251. In addition, all ports of the second junction block assembly 1258 are closed except for port J, which is in communication with the pressure side 1260 of the pump 1256, and port K, which is in an open position in this configuration. The pump 1256 can be activated to evacuate fluid from the machine 1251 as drawn through the piping and through port D, through port A, through the pump 1256, through port J, and ultimately through port K. Once the fluid evacuation process is completed, all ports of the first and second junction block assemblies 1252,1258 can be closed, except for the refill

port E and ports A, J and G. The pump 1256 can be activated to draw fluid from port E through the piping and through port A, through the pump 1256, through port J, and through port G into the machine 1251. Based on this operational example, it can be seen how opening and closing various ports in various configurations of the valve system permits multiple evacuation and refill processes to be performed from multiple fluid replacement sources to multiple machine reservoirs in a variety of sequences. It can also be seen that a common evacuation point (e.g., port K) can be provided for various fluid processes that are performed by use of the valve system. In addition, it can be appreciated that different types of fluids (e.g., without limitation, engine oil, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid, coolants, and other machine fluids) can be alternately and/or sequentially evacuated/refilled in connection with the various embodiments of the present methods and systems.

[0110] Various aspects of the following disclosure include operational examples for the various system and method embodiments described herein. It can be appreciated that such operational examples are provided merely for convenience of disclosure, and that no particular aspect or aspects of these operational examples are intended to limit the scope of application of the present systems and methods.

[0111] Referring now to Figures 24, 25A and 25B, a fluid system 1301 is provided including an engine 1302 and a pump 1304 operatively connected to a junction block assembly 1400. As shown in Figures 25A and 25B, the junction block assembly 1400 includes a substantially cube-shaped body 1402 having a plurality of ports, such as ports 1404A, 1404B, 1404C, for example, formed therein. The junction block assembly 1400 can include any conventional material suitable for use in connection with the various fluid evacuation and refill

processes described herein such as, for example and without limitation, aluminum, stainless steel, and other like materials. In the embodiment shown, the junction block assembly 1400 may possess a plurality of ports up to six ports, for example.

[0112] In one embodiment of the junction block assembly 1400, one or more screens 1406 may be inserted between the body 1402 and one or more adapter fittings 1408 structured to be received, such as threadedly received, for example, into the junction block assembly 1400. It can be appreciated that one or more of the screens 1406 can be positioned within the junction block assembly 1400 and/or more generally at any suitable location within the fluid systems described herein. In one embodiment, one or more of the screens 1406 may be formed as an integral assembly with one or more of the adapter fittings 1408. In one aspect of such an integral arrangement, the screen 1406 can be positioned at a common location at which particles and other contaminants present in a fluid system may be trapped, inspected and/or removed from the fluid system. In other aspects, the screens 1406 and/or adapter fittings 1408 may be installed in conjunction with other components of a fluid system such as a pump, for example.

[0113] In one illustrative fluid system embodiment, the screen 1406 can be positioned in the junction block assembly 1400 at a common outlet port of the junction block assembly 1400, wherein during operation of the fluid system the common outlet port is in fluid communication with the suction side or inlet port of a pump. In this embodiment, one or more fluids received into the junction block assembly 1400 from one or more fluid reservoirs can each be filtered by the screen 1406 positioned within the common outlet port of the junction block assembly 1400.

[0114] In one aspect of the present embodiments, the adapter fitting 1408 can include a permanent or removably insertable plug that resists fluid from entering or exiting the particular port of the junction block assembly 1400 in which the adapter fitting 1408 is installed. In another aspect, the adapter fitting can include a magnetic plug, for example, to attract and capture ferrous materials, for example, and other particles or contaminants susceptible to magnetic attraction to the magnetic plug. It can be seen that, in a fluid system, a junction block assembly 1400 including an adapter fitting 1408 having a magnetic plug can be employed as a central or common location at which particles or contaminants present in the fluid system can be trapped, collected, inspected and/or analyzed. In one embodiment in which the magnetic plug is removably insertable from the junction block assembly, the magnetic plug can assist the junction block assembly 1400 in becoming a material/debris trap that allows for periodic inspections, for example, for detecting metal particles, for example, that may indicate damage, or the potential for damage, occurring in the reservoir or a related machine system.

[0115] Referring now to Figure 25C, one example illustration of an embodiment a portion of a fluid system 1452 provided in accordance with the present methods and systems is shown. The fluid system 1452 includes a pump 1454 in fluid communication with a junction block assembly 1400. In addition, a screen 1456 is positioned within a section of piping 1458 located between the pump 1454 and the junction block assembly 1400 on a suction side 1460 of the pump 1454. In other aspects, it can be appreciated that the screen 1456 can be positioned to function at a variety of locations within the fluid system 1452 or other fluid systems. In the embodiment shown, it can be seen that the screen 1456 may act as a common location for collecting, trapping, and/or filtering particles, debris and/or contaminants flowing through the

fluid system 1452. During operation of the pump 1454 within the filter system 1452, for example, particles, debris and/or contaminants are drawn from various other portions (not shown) of the fluid system 1452 through the section of piping 1458 including the screen 1456 to trap, collect, and/or filter those particles, debris, and/or contaminants, before fluid is permitted to flow to the suction side 1460 of the pump 1454 to be drawn into the pump 1454.

[0116] Referring again to Figure 24, the junction block assembly 1400 can be connected to a fluid evacuation/refill port 1306 that permits fluids to exit (during a fluid evacuation process) or enter (during a fluid refill process) the fluid system 1301. During an evacuation process, valve 1308 is actuated (such as by operation of a machine control 1110A of the control module 1100, for example, or by manual operation) to a closed position, and the pump 1304 is activated to evacuate fluid from the engine 1302 through the port 1306 connected to the junction block assembly 1400. It can be seen that the junction block assembly 1400 is appropriately positioned/actuated to permit fluid to flow from the pump 1304 to the port 1306 during the evacuation procedure. During a refill procedure, the valve 1308 can be moved to an open position, and the junction block assembly 1400 can be appropriately positioned/actuated to permit fluid to flow from a reservoir and/or other apparatus (not shown) attached to the port 1306 to refill one or more fluid reservoirs via unfiltered or pre-filtered passages, for example, or other receptacles of the engine 1302.

[0117] In various embodiments described herein, a conventional filter 1310 can be provided in association with a component such as an engine, for example, to filter contaminants or other particles that pass through the fluid system 1301 during the refill procedure and/or during normal operation of the engine 1302. It can be appreciated that the type and/or

configuration of conventional filters installed within or in association with the components of the fluid system 1301 can be provided in a variety of ways as will be evident to those skilled in the art.

[0118] The control module 1100 and the internal data module 1200 interact with the fluid system 1301, and more generally other fluid systems described hereinafter, as previously discussed hereinabove with reference to Figures 20 and 21. For convenience of disclosure, specific interaction and operation of the control module 1100 and the internal data module 1200 with fluid system embodiments described hereinafter are generally not described in detail, because such embodiments would be understood by those skilled in the art.

[0119] Referring now to Figure 26, in another embodiment of the present systems and methods, a fluid system 1501 is provided in which an engine 1502 is connected to a junction block assembly 1400 through a valve 1504. A reservoir 1506 is also connected to the junction block assembly 1400 through a valve 1508. In addition, a pump 1510 is connected to the junction block assembly 1400, and the pump 1510 is also connected to an evacuation bracket and quick disconnect assembly 1512 in accordance with such assemblies as previously described hereinabove. In one operational example of this embodiment, a fluid evacuation process may be performed by opening valve 1504 and closing valve 1508 to evacuate fluid from the engine 1502 through an evacuation port of the junction block assembly 1400. In one aspect, the fluid evacuation procedure can be performed by the operation of the pump 1510 to remove fluid from the engine 1502 through the evacuation bracket and quick disconnect assembly 1512. The engine 1502 can then be refilled by connecting a fluid replacement source, for example, or another reservoir to the evacuation bracket and quick disconnect assembly 1512. The reservoir

1506 can be evacuated by closing the valve 1504, opening the valve 1508, adjusting the positions of the various ports of the junction block assembly 1400, and operating the pump 1510 to evacuate fluid from the reservoir 1506 through the evacuation bracket and quick disconnect assembly 1512. In various embodiments of the present systems and methods, the reservoir 1506 may contain, for example and without limitation, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid, lubricants such as oil, water, or another fluid used in addition to the operation of the engine 1502 and/or the overall function of the fluid system 1501. In another aspect, a supplemental filter system 1514 may be operatively associated with the evacuation bracket and quick disconnect assembly 1512. In various aspects, the supplemental filter system 1514 may be, for example, a fine filtration system as that term is understood in the art.

[0120] Referring now to Figure 27, in various embodiments of the present systems and methods, a fluid system 1601 is provided in which an engine 1602 is connected to a first junction block assembly 1400 through a valve 1604. A reservoir 1606 is also connected to the junction block assembly 1400 through a valve 1608. The junction block assembly 1400 also includes an evacuation/refill port 1610 structured for receiving fluids introduced into the fluid system 1601, such as during a refill process, for example. In addition, a pump 1612 is connected to the first junction block assembly 1400, and the pump 1612 is also connected to a second junction block assembly 1400' through an optional valve 1614. The second junction block assembly 1400' includes an evacuation/refill port 1616 for removing/introducing fluids into the fluid system 1601, such as by an evacuation process or by a refill process, for example. In addition, the reservoir 1606 includes a fluid connection through a valve 1618 to the second junction block assembly 1400', and the engine 1602 also includes a fluid connection to the

second junction block assembly 1400' through a valve 1620. It can be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the fluid system 1601 permits a variety of combinations for performing evacuation and/or refill processes. The positions of the valves 1604,1608,1614,1618 and 1620, in operative interaction with the actuation of the first and second junction block assemblies 1400,1400' provide this variety of combinations for introducing or removing fluids, respectively and where applicable, through the ports 1610,1616.

[0121] In one aspect of an example of a fluid evacuation process, the engine 1602 can be identified for performance of one or more fluid refill/evacuation processes. Fluid can be evacuated from the engine 1602, for example, by opening valves 1604,1614, closing valves 1608,1618,1620, adjusting the positions of ports associated with the first and second junction block assemblies 1400,1400' (e.g., closing off ports not employed in a given fluid process, and other like adjustments), and activating the pump 1612 to draw fluid through the refill/evacuation port 1616. A subsequent refill process can be performed for the engine 1602 by closing valves 1604,1608,1618, opening valves 1614,1620, adjusting the appropriate positions of the ports of the first and second junction block assemblies 1400,1400' (e.g., closing off ports not employed in a given fluid process, and other like adjustments), and activating the pump 1612 to refill fluid into the engine 1602 by drawing the fluid from the evacuation/refill port 1610, through the pump 1612, to the engine 1602. It can be appreciated that the fluid employed for the fluid refill process for the engine 1602 can be drawn from one or more fluid replacement sources (not shown) operatively connected to the evacuation/refill port 1610 of the first junction block assembly 1400. In one aspect, the type of fluid drawn from the engine 1602 during the fluid evacuation

process is of the same type as the fluid refilled into the engine 1602 during the fluid refill process.

[0122] In other steps of this operational example, the reservoir 1606 can be identified for a fluid evacuation/refill process. The valves 1604,1618,1620 can be closed, the positions of the ports of the first and second junction block assemblies 1400,1400' can be adjusted (e.g., closing off ports not employed in a given fluid process, and other like adjustments), valves 1608,1614 can be opened, and the action of the pump 1612 can be employed to draw fluid from the reservoir 1606 through the evacuation/refill port 1616 of the second junction block assembly 1400'. In a subsequent fluid refill process, valves 1604,1608,1620 can be closed, valves 1614,1618 can be opened, and the pump 1612 can be employed to draw fluid through the evacuation/refill port 1610 of the first junction block assembly 1400 into the reservoir 1606 in the refill process. It can be appreciated that the fluid employed in the fluid refill process can be drawn from one or more fluid replacement sources (not shown) operatively associated with the evacuation/refill port 1610 of the first junction block assembly 1400. In one aspect, the type of fluid drawn from the reservoir 1606 during the fluid evacuation process is of the same type as the fluid refilled into the reservoir 1606 during the fluid refill process. In various embodiments of the present systems and methods, the reservoir 1606 may contain, for example and without limitation, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid, lubricants such as oil, water, or another fluid used in addition to the operation of the engine 1602 and/or the overall function of the fluid system 1601.

[0123] It can be appreciated that pumps employed in connection with the various fluid systems described herein can be "on-board" or "off-board" with respect to a machine that

operates in connection with the fluid system. For example, in one illustrative embodiment, an “off-board” pump could be applied in connection with the evacuation/refill port 1610 with the appropriate configuration of the valve system of the fluid system of Figure 27 to perform one or more fluid evacuation/refill processes.

[0124] Referring now to Figure 28, in various embodiments of the present systems and methods, a fluid system 1701 is provided in which an engine 1702 is connected to both a first multi-position valve 1704 and a second multi-position valve 1706. One or more reservoirs 1708,1709 are also fluidically connected to each of the first and second multi-position valves 1704,1706. In addition, a pump 1710 is provided to facilitate one or more evacuation processes in connection with fluids contained with the engine 1702 and/or the reservoirs 1708,1709. In various embodiments of the present systems and methods, the reservoirs 1708,1709 may contain, for example and without limitation, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid, lubricants such as oil, water, or another fluid used in addition to the operation of the engine 1702 and/or the overall function of the fluid system 1701. In one aspect of the operation of the fluid system 1701, each of the multi-position valves 1704,1706 is actuated/positioned to permit the action of the pump 1710 to evacuate and refill fluids from the engine 1702 and the reservoirs 1708,1709, in a sequence determined by an operator, for example, or by an automated determination by the control module 1100, for example.

[0125] In one aspect of an operational example, the engine 1702 can be identified for performance of one or more fluid evacuation/refill processes. In a fluid evacuation process, appropriate ports of the multi-position valves 1704,1706 are actuated, in conjunction with activation of the pump 1710, to draw fluid from the engine 1702 through the multi-position valve

1704, through the pump 1710, and through a selected port of the multi-position valve 1706 serving as an evacuation port. It can be appreciated that a waste-receiving receptacle, for example (not shown), may be operatively associated with the selected evacuation port of the multi-position valve 1706 to receive and/or store fluid evacuated from the engine 1702. In a subsequent fluid refill process, appropriate ports of the multi-position valves 1704,1706 are actuated, in conjunction with activation of the pump 1710, to draw fluid from a selected port of the multi-position valve 1704 serving as a refill port, through the pump 1710, through the multi-position valve 1706, and to the engine 1702. It can be appreciated that a fluid replacement source, for example (not shown), may be operatively associated with the selected refill port of the multi-position valve 1704 to provide a source for fluid introduced into the fluid system 1701 and used for the refill process for the engine 1702.

[0126] In another aspect of this operational example, the reservoir 1708 can be identified for performance of one or more fluid refill/evacuation processes. In a fluid evacuation process, appropriate ports of the multi-position valves 1704,1706 are actuated, in conjunction with activation of the pump 1710, to draw fluid from the reservoir 1708 through the multi-position valve 1704, through the pump 1710, and through a selected port of the multi-position valve 1706 serving as an evacuation port. It can be appreciated that a waste-receiving receptacle, for example (not shown), may be operatively associated with the selected evacuation port of the multi-position valve 1706 to receive and/or store fluid evacuated from the reservoir 1708. In a subsequent fluid refill process, appropriate ports of the multi-position valves 1704,1706 are actuated, in conjunction with activation of the pump 1710, to draw fluid from a selected port of the multi-position valve 1704 serving as a refill port, through the pump 1710, through the multi-

position valve 1706, and to the reservoir 1708. It can be appreciated that a fluid replacement source, for example (not shown), may be operatively associated with the selected refill port of the multi-position valve 1704 to provide a source for fluid introduced into the fluid system 1701 and used for the refill process for the reservoir 1708.

[0127] In another aspect of this operational example, the reservoir 1709 can be identified for performance of one or more fluid refill/evacuation processes. In a fluid evacuation process, appropriate ports of the multi-position valves 1704, 1706 are actuated, in conjunction with activation of the pump 1710, to draw fluid from the reservoir 1709 through the multi-position valve 1704, through the pump 1710, and through a selected port of the multi-position valve 1706 serving as an evacuation port. It can be appreciated that a waste-receiving receptacle, for example (not shown), may be operatively associated with the selected evacuation port of the multi-position valve 1706 to receive and/or store fluid evacuated from the reservoir 1709. In a subsequent fluid refill process, appropriate ports of the multi-position valves 1704, 1706 are actuated, in conjunction with activation of the pump 1710, to draw fluid from a selected port of the multi-position valve 1704 serving as a refill port, through the pump 1710, through the multi-position valve 1706, and to the reservoir 1709. It can be appreciated that a fluid replacement source, for example (not shown), may be operatively associated with the selected refill port of the multi-position valve 1704 to provide a source for fluid introduced into the fluid system 1701 and used for the refill process for the reservoir 1709.

[0128] It is readily apparent to those skilled in the art that, in accordance with various aspects of the present method and system embodiments, engines, reservoirs and other like receptacles can be first evacuated and subsequently refilled in a manner that permits a pump not

to encounter a refill fluid (e.g., a “clean” fluid) of a certain type, until the pump has processed an evacuated fluid (e.g., a “dirty” fluid) of the same type as the refill fluid. It can be seen that this sequence of fluid evacuation/refill processes can reduce the degree of cross-contamination for components or other elements of a fluid system that may be caused by a mixture of different types of fluids.

[0129] Referring now to Figure 29, in various embodiments of the present systems and methods, a fluid system 1801 is provided in which an engine 1802 is connected to both a first multi-position valve 1804 having a refill port 1806 and a second multi-position valve 1808 having an evacuation port 1810. A reservoir 1812 is also fluidly connected to each of the first and second multi-position valves 1804,1808. In addition, a pump 1814 is provided to facilitate one or more evacuation and/or refill processes in connection with fluids contained with the engine 1802 and/or the reservoir 1812. In another aspect, an additional reservoir 1813 is connected between the first multi-position valve 1804 and the second multi-position valve 1806. In various embodiments of the present systems and methods, the reservoirs 1812,1813 may contain, for example and without limitation, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid, lubricants such as oil, water, or another fluid used in addition to the operation of the engine 1802 and/or the overall function of the fluid system 1801.

[0130] In one example aspect of the operation of the fluid system 1801 shown in Figure 29, the multi-position valves 1804,1808 are actuated/positioned to permit the action of the pump 1814 to remove fluid from the reservoir 1812. Then, in this operational example, the multi-position valves 1804,1808 can be actuated/positioned to perform a fluid refill process for

the reservoir 1812. Thereafter, the engine 1802 can be evacuated and then refilled in sequence once the fluid processes involving the reservoir 1812 have been completed.

[0131] In accordance with previous discussion hereinabove, it can be appreciated that the operative association of the fluid system 1801, for example, with the control module 1100 permits a variety of sequences and combinations of evacuation and refill processes. Such sequencing can be facilitated by the control module 1100 through a combination of manual and/or automated processes executed in conjunction with the operation of the control module 1100. It can be seen that such sequencing of evacuation and/or refill operations can be applied to various previously discussed embodiments of the present systems and methods, as well as embodiments discussed hereinafter.

[0132] Referring now to Figure 30, in various embodiments of the present systems and methods, a fluid system 1901 is provided in which an engine 1902 is connected to a junction block assembly 1400 through a valve 1904. A first reservoir 1906 is also connected to the junction block assembly 1400 through a valve 1908. In addition, a second reservoir 1910 is connected to the junction block assembly 1400 through a valve 1912. The junction block assembly 1400 includes an evacuation port 1914 structured to fluidically connect with a quick disconnect 1916. In operation of the fluid system 1901, the quick disconnect 1916 establishes fluid connection between the junction block assembly 1400 and a pump 1918. In addition, a waste-receiving receptacle 1920 is connected to the pump 1918. In an example fluid evacuation process, the respective positions of the valves 1904,1908,1912, the actuation/position of the junction block assembly 1400, the connection of the quick disconnect 1916 to the evacuation port 1914, and the operation of the pump 1918 work in conjunction to perform a fluid evacuation

process for each of the engine 1902 and the first and second reservoirs 1906,1910. For example, it can be seen that such a fluid evacuation process results in fluid flowing from the engine 1902 into the waste-receiving receptacle 1920. It can be appreciated that the functions of the control module 1100, working in association with the various components of the fluid system 1901, can result in evacuating fluids, and subsequently refilling fluids, for one or more of the engine 1902 and the reservoirs 1906,1910 in a sequential manner. In various embodiments of the present systems and methods, the reservoirs 1906,1910 may contain, for example and without limitation, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid, lubricants such as oil, water, or another fluid used in addition to the operation of the engine 1902 and/or the overall function of the fluid system 1901.

[0133] Referring now to Figure 31, in various embodiments of the present systems and methods, a fluid system 2001 is provided in which an engine 2002 is connected to a junction block assembly 1400 through a valve 2004. A first reservoir 2006 is also connected to the junction block assembly 1400 through a valve 2008. In addition, a second reservoir 2010 is connected to the junction block assembly 1400 through a valve 2012. The junction block assembly 1400 includes a refill port 2014 structured to fluidly connect with a quick disconnect 2016. In operation of the fluid system 2001, the quick disconnect 2016 establishes fluid connection between the junction block assembly 1400 and a pump 2018. In addition, a fluid source 2020 is connected to the pump 2018. In one aspect of the present embodiment, the fluid source may be detachably connected to the pump 2018 so that subsequent fluid sources (not shown) containing a variety of fluids can be introduced to the fluid system 2001 through the action of the pump 2018. In an example fluid refill process, the respective positions of the valves 2004,2008,2012, the actuation/position of the junction block assembly 1400, the

connection of the quick disconnect 2016 to the refill port 2014, and the operation of the pump 2018 work in conjunction to perform various fluid refill processes for the engine 2002 and the first and second reservoirs 2006,2010. In one example, it can be seen that such a fluid refill process can result in fluid flowing into the engine 2002 (after a prior fluid evacuation process) from the fluid source 2020. It can be appreciated that the functions of the control module 1100, working in association with the various components of the fluid system 2001, can result in evacuating/refilling one or more of the engine 2002 and the reservoirs 2006,2010 in a sequential manner. As shown, filters 2022,2024,2026 may be employed to filter contaminants or other particles present in fluid flowing from the fluid source 2020 to the engine 2002, the first reservoir 2006, or the second reservoir 2010 (respectively). In various embodiments of the present systems and methods, the reservoirs 2006,2010 may contain, for example and without limitation, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid, lubricants such as oil, water, or another fluid used in addition to the operation of the engine 2002 and/or the overall function of the fluid system 2001. In addition, in another aspect, supplemental filter system 2028 can be installed between the refill port 2014 and the pump 2018. In various aspects of the present systems and methods, the supplemental filter system 2028 may be, for example, a fine filtration system, as that term is understood in the art.

[0134] Referring now to Figure 32, in various embodiments of the present invention, a check valve assembly 2100 is provided in accordance with various systems and methods. The assembly 2100 includes a first check valve 2102 having an inlet 2102A in fluid communication with a common refill/evacuation location 2104 and an outlet 2102B in fluid communication with a portion of a fluid system 2106. A second check valve 2108 of the assembly 2100 includes an

inlet 2108A in communication with a fluid reservoir 2110, for example, or another similar structure included within a fluid system. The second check valve 2108 further includes an outlet 2108B in fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2104. In addition, an inlet/outlet port 2112 may be structured for fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2104.

[0135] In various embodiments, the portion of a fluid system 2106 may include any reasonable combination of valves, pipes, reservoirs and/or other fluidic structures. In certain embodiments, the portion of a fluid system 2106 may be configured to include an operative association with at least a pre-filter portion of the fluid system. In various embodiments, the fluid reservoir 2110 may contain a quantity of a fluid such as oil, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid, or another type of fluid described hereinabove and/or any other fluid suitable for use in accordance with the present systems and methods. In certain embodiments, a quick disconnect 2114 or other similar type of coupling may be operatively associated with the inlet/outlet port 2112 to permit operative association of various fluidic structures such as an external pump, for example, with the inlet/outlet port 2112. In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2112 may be operatively associated with a clustered service location (as described hereinabove), for example.

[0136] In various embodiments, the inlet 2102A of the first check valve 2102 may be structured to respond to application of positive pressure (represented by arrow 2116) at the common refill/evacuation location 2104, which response to the positive pressure 2116 includes actuating the first check valve 2102 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “positive” means pressure which is at a level sufficient

to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2116 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2112 to the inlet 2102A of the first check valve 2102). During a filter purge operation, for example, compressed air may be introduced as positive pressure at the common refill/evacuation location 2104 and the inlet 2102A of the first check valve 2102. The positive pressure of the compressed air actuates the first check valve 2102 to permit the compressed air to flow to at least the portion of a fluid system 2016 and/or through passages, valves, filters, reservoirs or other fluidic structures in the fluid system that may contain old or used fluids (e.g., old or used oil). During a refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2116 at the common refill/evacuation location 2104 permits fluid flowing from the inlet/outlet port 2112 to flow through the first check valve 2102 to the portion of a fluid system 2106.

[0137] Conversely, the second check valve 2108 may be structured to respond to application of negative pressure (represented by arrow 2118) at the common refill/evacuation location 2104, which response to the negative pressure 2118 includes actuating the second check valve 2108 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “negative” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2118 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the outlet 2108B of the second check valve 2108 to the inlet/outlet port 2112). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2118 at the common refill/evacuation location 2104 permits fluid to flow through the second check valve 2108 to the inlet/outlet port 2112 of the assembly 2100. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit

alternative performance of positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations at the common refill/evacuation location 2104.

[0138] In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2112 may be in fluid communication with one or more fluid components, such as fluid component 2120 shown in Figure 32. The fluid component 2120 may include one or more of the following fluidic structures, for example and without limitation: a pump that is off-board with respect to a machine being serviced; a pump that is on-board with respect to a machine being serviced; a flow control means (in accordance with embodiments described hereinabove) such as a hand-held device, for example; and/or, a bracket or evacuation bracket (in accordance with embodiments described hereinabove). The fluid component 2120 may also be any other component suitable for supplying positive and/or negative fluid pressure to the inlet/outlet port 2112 in accordance with the various fluid operations described herein.

[0139] Referring now to Figure 33, in various embodiments of the present invention, a check valve system 2148 may include multiple check valve assemblies 2150, 2170, 2190 configured in accordance with the present invention to service multiple fluid reservoirs 2160, 2180, 2200, for example, and/or multiple kinds of fluids contained in the fluid reservoirs 2160, 2180, 2200. In various embodiments, one or more of the check valve assemblies 2150, 2170, 2190 may be structured to be part of the same fluid system, or any of the check valve assemblies 2150, 2170, 2190 may be structured for operation as part of an independently operating fluid system.

[0140] In the first check valve assembly 2150, for example, a first check valve 2152 may be structured with an inlet 2152A in fluid communication with a common refill/evacuation

location 2154 and an outlet 2152B in fluid communication with a portion of a fluid system 2156. In certain embodiments, the portion of a fluid system 2156 may be configured to include an operative association with at least a pre-filter portion of the fluid system. A second check valve 2158 of the assembly 2150 includes an inlet 2158A in communication with the fluid reservoir 2160, for example, or another similar structure in fluidic association with the assembly 2150. The second check valve 2158 further includes an outlet 2158B in fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2154. An inlet/outlet port 2162 may be structured for fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2154. In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2162 may be operatively associated with a clustered service location (as described hereinabove), for example. In certain embodiments, a quick disconnect (not shown) may be operatively associated with the common refill/evacuation location 2154 to permit ready connection and disconnection of fluidic structures in operative association with the common refill/evacuation location 2154.

[0141] In various embodiments, the inlet 2152A of the first check valve 2152 may be structured to respond to application of positive pressure (represented by arrow 2166) at the common refill/evacuation location 2154, which response to the positive pressure 2166 includes actuating the first check valve 2152 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “positive” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2166 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2162 to the inlet 2152A of the first check valve 2152). During a fluid refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2166 at the common

refill/evacuation location 2154 permits fluid flowing from the inlet/outlet port 2162 to flow through the first check valve 2152 to the portion of a fluid system 2156.

[0142] Conversely, the second check valve 2158 may be structured to respond to application of negative pressure (represented by arrow 2168) at the common refill/evacuation location 2154, which response to the negative pressure 2168 includes actuating the second check valve 2168 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “negative” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2168 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the outlet 2158B of the second check valve 2158 to the inlet/outlet port 2162). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2168 at the common refill/evacuation location 2154 permits fluid to flow through the second check valve 2158 to the inlet/outlet port 2162 of the assembly 2150. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit alternative performance of positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations at the common refill/evacuation location 2154.

[0143] In other aspects of the check valve system 2148, with reference to the second check valve assembly 2170, a third check valve 2172 may be structured with an inlet 2172A in fluid communication with a common refill/evacuation location 2174 and an outlet 2172B in fluid communication with a portion of a fluid system 2176. In certain embodiments, the portion of a fluid system 2176 may be configured to include an operative association with at least a pre-filter portion of the fluid system. A fourth check valve 2178 of the assembly 2150 includes an inlet 2178A in fluid communication with the fluid reservoir 2180, for example, or another similar structure fluidically associated with the assembly 2170. The fourth check valve 2178 further

includes an outlet 2178B in fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2174. An inlet/outlet port 2182 may be structured for fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2174. In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2182 may be operatively associated with a clustered service location (as described hereinabove), for example. In certain embodiments, a quick disconnect (not shown) may be operatively associated with the common refill/evacuation location 2174 to permit ready connection or disconnection of fluidic structures in operative association with/from the common refill/evacuation location 2174.

[0144] In various embodiments, the inlet 2172A of the third check valve 2172 may be structured to respond to application of positive pressure (represented by arrow 2186) at the common refill/evacuation location 2174, which response to the positive pressure 2186 includes actuating the third check valve 2172 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “positive” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2186 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2182 to the inlet 2172A of the third check valve 2172). During a refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2186 at the common refill/evacuation location 2174 permits fluid flowing from the inlet/outlet port 2182 to flow through the third check valve 2172 to the portion of a fluid system 2176.

[0145] Conversely, the fourth check valve 2178 may be structured to respond to application of negative pressure (represented by arrow 2188) at the common refill/evacuation location 2174, which response to the negative pressure 2188 includes actuating the fourth check valve 2188 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “negative” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids

in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2188 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the outlet 2178B of the fourth check valve 2178 to the inlet/outlet port 2182). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2188 at the common refill/evacuation location 2174 permits fluid to flow through the fourth check valve 2178 to the inlet/outlet port 2182 of the assembly 2170. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit alternative performance of positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations at the common refill/evacuation location 2174.

[0146] With reference to the third check valve assembly 2190 of the system 2148, a fifth check valve 2192 may have an inlet 2192A in fluid communication with a common refill/evacuation location 2194 and an outlet 2192B in fluid communication with a portion of a fluid system 2196. In certain embodiments, the portion of a fluid system 2196 may be configured to include an operative association with at least a pre-filter portion of the fluid system. A sixth check valve 2198 of the assembly 2190 includes an inlet 2198A in fluid communication with the fluid reservoir 2200, for example, or another similar structure fluidically associated with the assembly 2190. The sixth check valve 2198 further includes an outlet 2198B in fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2194. An inlet/outlet port 2202 may be structured for fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2194. In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2112 may be operatively associated with a clustered service location (as described hereinabove), for example. In certain embodiments, a quick disconnect (not shown) may be operatively associated with the common refill/evacuation location 2194 to permit ready connection and disconnection of fluidic structures in operative association with the common refill/evacuation location 2194.

[0147] In various embodiments, the inlet 2192A of the fifth check valve 2192 may be structured to respond to application of positive pressure (represented by arrow 2206) at the common refill/evacuation location 2194, which response to the positive pressure 2206 includes actuating the fifth check valve 2192 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “positive” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2206 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2202 to the inlet 2192A of the fifth check valve 2192). During a refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2206 at the common refill/evacuation location 2194 permits fluid flowing from the inlet/outlet port 2202 to flow through the fifth check valve 2192 to the portion of a fluid system 2196.

[0148] Conversely, the sixth check valve 2198 may be structured to respond to application of negative pressure (represented by arrow 2208) at the common refill/evacuation location 2194, which response to the negative pressure 2208 includes actuating the sixth check valve 2198 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “negative” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2208 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the outlet 2198B of the sixth check valve 2198 to the inlet/outlet port 2202). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2208 at the common refill/evacuation location 2194 permits fluid to flow through the sixth check valve 2198 to the inlet/outlet port 2202 of the assembly 2190. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit alternative performance of positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations at the common refill/evacuation location 2194.

[0149] It can be seen that multiple check valve assembly configurations (e.g., such as configurations that include the check valve assemblies 2150, 2170, 2190) permit multiple fluid operations such as refill operations, evacuation operations, and/or filter purge operations, for example, to be performed on multiple fluid reservoirs. It can be appreciated that any number of check valve assemblies may be provided within the scope of the present methods and systems. The illustration of three separate check valve assemblies 2150, 2170, 2190 in Figure 33, for example, is merely for purposes of convenience of disclosure. More or fewer check valve assemblies may be employed in operative association with fluid systems configured in accordance with the present invention. Each of the portions of a fluid system 2156, 2176, 2196 may include any reasonable combination of valves, pipes, reservoirs and/or other fluidic structures. In various embodiments, one or more of the fluid reservoirs 2160, 2180, 2200 may contain a quantity of a fluid such as oil, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid, or another type of fluid described hereinabove and/or any other fluid suitable for use in accordance with the present systems and methods.

[0150] In various embodiments, any one or more of the inlet/outlet ports 2162, 2182, 2202 may be in fluid communication with one or more fluid components (not shown) including one or more of the following fluidic structures, for example and without limitation: a pump that is off-board with respect to a machine being serviced; a pump that is on-board with respect to a machine being serviced; a flow control means (in accordance with embodiments described hereinabove) such as a hand-held device, for example; and/or, a bracket or evacuation bracket (in accordance with embodiments described hereinabove). The fluid component may also be any

other component suitable for supplying positive and/or negative fluid pressure to the inlet/outlet ports 2162, 2182, 2202 in accordance with various fluid operations described herein.

[0151] Referring now to Figure 34, in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, an electronic valve assembly 2300 is provided in accordance with the present systems and methods. The assembly 2300 includes a first electronic valve 2302 having an inlet 2302A in fluid communication with a common refill/evacuation location 2304 and an outlet 2302B in fluid communication with a portion of a fluid system 2306. In various embodiments, the portion of a fluid system 2306 may include an operative association with at least a pre-filter portion of the fluid system. A second electronic valve 2308 of the assembly 2300 includes an inlet 2308A in communication with a fluid reservoir 2310, for example, or another similar structure included within the fluid system 2300. The second electronic valve 2308 further includes an outlet 2308B in fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2304. In addition, an inlet/outlet port 2312 may be structured for fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2304.

[0152] The portion of the fluid system 2306 may include any reasonable combination of valves, pipes, reservoirs and/or other fluidic structures. In various embodiments, the fluid reservoir 2310 may contain a quantity of a fluid such as oil, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid, or another type of fluid described hereinabove and/or any other fluid suitable for use in accordance with the present systems and methods. In certain embodiments, a quick disconnect 2314 or other similar type of coupling may be operatively associated with the inlet/outlet port 2312 to permit operative association of various fluidic structures such as an external pump, for example, with the inlet/outlet port 2312. In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2312 may

be operatively associated with a clustered service location (as described hereinabove), for example.

[0153] In various embodiments, a control module 2316 may be operatively associated with one or both of the electronic valves 2302, 2308 to actuate the valves 2302, 2308 upon sensing a predetermined pressure level, for example, within the assembly 2300. One or more sensors such as pressure sensors 2318, 2320, for example, may be operatively associated with the control module 2316 and/or the electronic valves 2302, 2308 to provide pressure level information to the control module 2316.

[0154] The sensor 2318 associated with the first electronic valve 2302, for example, may be configured to communicate a signal indicative of application of positive pressure (represented by arrow 2322) at the common refill/evacuation location 2304, which response to the positive pressure 2322 includes actuating the first electronic valve 2302 to permit fluid flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “positive” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2322 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2312 to the inlet 2302A of the first electronic valve 2302). During a refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2322 at the common refill/evacuation location 2304, and subsequent actuation of the first electronic valve 2302 by the control module 2316, permit fluid to flow from the inlet/outlet port 2312, through the first electronic valve 2302 to the portion of the fluid system 2306.

[0155] In addition, the sensor 2320 associated with the second electronic valve 2308, for example, may be configured to communicate a signal indicative of application of negative

pressure (represented by arrow 2324) at the common refill/evacuation location 2304, which response to the negative pressure 2324 includes actuating the second electronic valve 2308 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “negative” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2324 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the outlet 2308B of the second electronic valve 2308 to the inlet/outlet port 2312). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2324 at the common refill/evacuation location 2304, and subsequent actuation of the second electronic valve 2308, permit fluid to flow through the second electronic valve 2308 to the inlet/outlet port 2312 of the assembly 2300. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit alternative positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations to be performed at the common refill/evacuation location 2304.

[0156] In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2312 may be in fluid communication with one or more fluid components, such as fluid component 2326 shown in Figure 34. The fluid component 2326 may include one or more of the following fluidic structures, for example and without limitation: a pump that is off-board with respect to a machine being serviced; a pump that is on-board with respect to a machine being serviced; a flow control means (in accordance with embodiments described hereinabove) such as a hand-held device, for example; and/or, a bracket or evacuation bracket (in accordance with embodiments described hereinabove). The fluid component 2326 may also be any other component suitable for supplying positive and/or negative fluid pressure to the inlet/outlet port 2312 in accordance with the various fluid operations described herein.

[0157] Referring now to Figure 35, in various embodiments of the present invention, an electronic valve system 2348 may include multiple electronic valve assemblies 2350, 2370, 2390 configured in accordance with the present invention to service multiple fluid reservoirs, for example, and/or multiple kinds of fluids contained in the fluid reservoirs. In various embodiments, one or more of the electronic valve assemblies 2350, 2370, 2390 may be structured to be part of the same fluid system, or any of the electronic valve assemblies 2350, 2370, 2390 may be structured for operation as part of an independently operating fluid system. In the first electronic valve assembly 2350, for example, a first electronic valve 2352 may be structured with an inlet 2352A in fluid communication with a common refill/evacuation location 2354 and an outlet 2352B in fluid communication with a portion of a fluid system 2356. In certain embodiments, the portion of a fluid system 2356 may be configured to include an operative association with at least a pre-filter portion of the fluid system. A second electronic valve 2358 of the assembly 2350 may include an inlet 2358A in communication with a fluid reservoir 2360, for example, or another similar structure in fluidic association with the assembly 2350. The second electronic valve 2358 further includes an outlet 2358B in fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2354. An inlet/outlet port 2362 may be structured for fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2354. In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2362 may be operatively associated with a clustered service location (as described hereinabove), for example. In certain embodiments, a quick disconnect (not shown) may be operatively associated with the common refill/evacuation location 2354 to permit ready connection/disconnection of fluidic structures to/from operative association with the common refill/evacuation location 2354.

[0158] In various embodiments, the inlet 2352A of the first electronic valve 2352 may be structured to respond to application of positive pressure (represented by arrow 2366) at the common refill/evacuation location 2354, which response to the positive pressure 2366 includes actuating the first electronic valve 2352 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “positive” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2366 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2362 to the inlet 2352A of the first electronic valve 2352). During a refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2366 at the common refill/evacuation location 2354 permits fluid flowing from the inlet/outlet port 2362 to flow through the first electronic valve 2352 to the portion of a fluid system 2356.

[0159] Conversely, the second electronic valve 2358 may be structured to respond to application of negative pressure (represented by arrow 2368) at the common refill/evacuation location 2354, which response to the negative pressure 2368 includes actuating the second electronic valve 2358 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “negative” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2368 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the outlet 2358B of the second electronic valve 2358 to the inlet/outlet port 2362). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2368 at the common refill/evacuation location 2354 permits fluid to flow through the second electronic valve 2358 to the inlet/outlet port 2362 of the assembly 2350. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit alternative performance of positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations at the common refill/evacuation location 2354.

[0160] In other aspects of the electronic valve system 2348, with reference to the second electronic valve assembly 2370, a third electronic valve 2372 may be structured with an inlet 2372A in fluid communication with a common refill/evacuation location 2374 and an outlet 2372B in fluid communication with a portion of a fluid system 2376. In certain embodiments, the portion of a fluid system 2376 may be configured to include an operative association with at least a pre-filter portion of the fluid system. A fourth electronic valve 2378 of the assembly 2370 includes an inlet 2378A in fluid communication with a fluid reservoir 2380, for example, or another similar structure fluidically associated with the assembly 2370. The fourth electronic valve 2378 further includes an outlet 2378B in fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2374. An inlet/outlet port 2382 may be structured for fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2374. In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2382 may be operatively associated with a clustered service location (as described hereinabove), for example. In certain embodiments, a quick disconnect (not shown) may be operatively associated with the common refill/evacuation location 2374 to permit ready connection or disconnection of fluidic structures to/from operative association with the common refill/evacuation location 2374.

[0161] In various embodiments, the inlet 2372A of the third electronic valve 2372 may be structured to respond to application of positive pressure (represented by arrow 2386) at the common refill/evacuation location 2374, which response to the positive pressure 2386 includes actuating the third electronic valve 2372 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “positive” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2386 (e.g.,

fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2382 to the inlet 2372A of the third electronic valve 2372). During a refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2386 at the common refill/evacuation location 2374 permits fluid flowing from the inlet/outlet port 2382 to flow through the third electronic valve 2372 to the portion of a fluid system 2376.

[0162] Conversely, the fourth electronic valve 2378 may be structured to respond to application of negative pressure (represented by arrow 2388) at the common refill/evacuation location 2374, which response to the negative pressure 2388 includes actuating the fourth electronic valve 2388 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “negative” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2388 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the outlet 2378B of the fourth electronic valve 2378 to the inlet/outlet port 2382). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2388 at the common refill/evacuation location 2374 permits fluid to flow through the fourth electronic valve 2378 to the inlet/outlet port 2382 of the assembly 2370. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit alternative performance of positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations at the common refill/evacuation location 2374.

[0163] With reference to the third electronic valve assembly 2390 of the system 2348, a fifth electronic valve 2392 may have an inlet 2392A in fluid communication with a common refill/evacuation location 2394 and an outlet 2392B in fluid communication with a portion of a fluid system 2396. In certain embodiments, the portion of a fluid system 2396 may be configured to include an operative association with at least a pre-filter portion of the fluid system. A sixth electronic valve 2398 of the assembly 2390 includes an inlet 2398A in fluid

communication with a fluid reservoir 2400, for example, or another similar structure operatively associated with the assembly 2390. The sixth electronic valve 2398 further includes an outlet 2398B in fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2394. An inlet/outlet port 2402 may be structured for fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2394. In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2312 may be operatively associated with a clustered service location (as described hereinabove), for example. In certain embodiments, a quick disconnect (not shown) may be operatively associated with the common refill/evacuation location 2394 to permit ready connection or disconnection of fluidic structures to/from operative association with the common refill/evacuation location 2394.

[0164] In various embodiments, the inlet 2392A of the fifth electronic valve 2392 may be structured to respond to application of positive pressure (represented by arrow 2406) at the common refill/evacuation location 2394, which response to the positive pressure 2406 includes actuating the fifth electronic valve 2392 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “positive” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2406 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2402 to the inlet 2392A of the fifth electronic valve 2392). During a refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2406 at the common refill/evacuation location 2394 permits fluid flowing from the inlet/outlet port 2402 to flow through the fifth electronic valve 2392 to the portion of a fluid system 2396.

[0165] Conversely, the sixth electronic valve 2398 may be structured to respond to application of negative pressure (represented by arrow 2408) at the common refill/evacuation location 2394, which response to the negative pressure 2408 includes actuating the sixth

electronic valve 2398 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “negative” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2408 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the outlet 2398B of the sixth electronic valve 2398 to the inlet/outlet port 2402). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2408 at the common refill/evacuation location 2394 permits fluid to flow through the sixth electronic valve 2398 to the inlet/outlet port 2402 of the assembly 2390. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit alternative performance of positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations at the common refill/evacuation location 2394.

[0166] In various embodiments, a control module 2502 may be operatively associated with one or more of the electronic valves 2352, 2358, 2372, 2378, 2392, 2398 to actuate the valves 2352, 2358, 2372, 2378, 2392, 2398 upon sensing a predetermined pressure level, for example, within one or more of the assemblies 2350, 2370, 2390 of the electronic valve system 2348. One or more sensors such as pressure sensors 2504, 2506, 2508, 2510, 2512, 2514, for example, may be operatively associated with the control module 2502 and/or the electronic valves 2352, 2358, 2372, 2378, 2392, 2398 to provide pressure level information to the control module 2502.

[0167] The sensor 2504 associated with the first electronic valve 2352 of the first electronic valve assembly 2350 of the system 2348, for example, may be configured to communicate a signal indicative of application of positive pressure (represented by arrow 2366) at the common refill/evacuation location 2354, which response to the positive pressure 2366 includes actuating the first electronic valve 2352 to permit fluid flow therethrough. As applied

herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “positive” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2366 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2362 to the inlet 2352A of the first electronic valve 2352). During a refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2366 at the common refill/evacuation location 2354, and subsequent actuation of the first electronic valve 2352 by the control module 2502, for example, together permit fluid to flow from the inlet/outlet port 2362, through the first electronic valve 2352 to the portion of the fluid system 2356.

[0168] In addition, the sensor 2506 associated with the second electronic valve 2358, for example, may be configured to communicate a signal indicative of application of negative pressure (represented by arrow 2368) at the common refill/evacuation location 2354, which response to the negative pressure 2368 includes actuating the second electronic valve 2358 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “negative” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2368 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the outlet 2358B of the second electronic valve 2358 to the inlet/outlet port 2362). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2368 at the common refill/evacuation location 2354, and subsequent actuation of the second electronic valve 2358, permit fluid to flow through the second electronic valve 2358 to the inlet/outlet port 2362 of the assembly 2350. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit alternative positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations to be performed at the common refill/evacuation location 2354.

[0169] It can be seen that multiple electronic valve assembly configurations (e.g., such as configurations that include the electronic valve assemblies 2350, 2370, 2390) permit multiple fluid operations such as refill operations, evacuation operations, and/or filter purge operations, for example, to be performed on multiple fluid reservoirs. It can be appreciated that any number of electronic valve assemblies may be provided within the scope of the present methods and systems. The illustration of three separate electronic valve assemblies 2350, 2370, 2390 in Figure 35, for example, is merely for purposes of convenience of disclosure. More or less electronic valve assemblies may be employed in operative association with fluid systems configured in accordance with the present invention. Each of the portions of a fluid system 2356, 2376, 2396 may include any reasonable combination of valves, pipes, reservoirs and/or other fluidic structures. In various embodiments, one or more of the fluid reservoirs 2360, 2380, 2400 may contain a quantity of a fluid such as oil, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid, or another type of fluid described hereinabove and/or any other fluid suitable for use in accordance with the present systems and methods.

[0170] In various embodiments, any one or more of the inlet/outlet ports 2362, 2382, 2402 may be in fluid communication with one or more fluid components including one or more of the following fluidic structures, for example and without limitation: a pump that is off-board with respect to a machine being serviced; a pump that is on-board with respect to a machine being serviced; a flow control means (in accordance with embodiments described hereinabove) such as a hand-held device, for example; and/or, a bracket or evacuation bracket (in accordance with embodiments described hereinabove). The fluid component may also be any other

component suitable for supplying positive and/or negative fluid pressure to the inlet/outlet ports 2362, 2382, 2402 in accordance with the various fluid operations described herein.

[0171] Referring now to Figure 36, an illustration of a fluid system 2600 in accordance with various aspects of the present systems and methods is provided. The fluid system 2600 includes a first check valve 2602 having an inlet 2602A in fluid communication with a common refill/evacuation location 2604 and an outlet 2602B in fluid communication with a pre-filter portion 2606 of the fluid system 2600. A second check valve 2608 of the fluid system 2600 includes an inlet 2608A in communication with an engine fluid reservoir 2610, for example. The second check valve 2608 further includes an outlet 2608B in fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2604. In addition, an inlet/outlet port 2612 may be structured for fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2604. In another aspect, a fluid filter 2614 is in fluid communication with the pre-filter portion 2606 and the fluid reservoir 2610 of the fluid system 2600. It can be appreciated that the fluid filter 2614 may be, for example and without limitation, an oil filter, a transmission fluid filter, a hydraulic fluid filter or a variety of other types of suitable fluid filters for corresponding types of fluid systems. In various embodiments, a quick disconnect 2616 or other similar type of coupling may be operatively associated with the inlet/outlet port 2612 to permit operative association of various fluidic structures such as an external pump, for example, with the inlet/outlet port 2612.

[0172] Referring now to Figure 37, a flow chart is provided that includes examples of various fluid operations that may be performed in accordance with the present systems and methods. In step 2702, and in connection with the fluid system 2600 of Figure 36 by way of example, positive pressure may be introduced at the common refill/evacuation location 2604. A

fluid such as air, for example, may be introduced through the inlet/outlet port 2612 to provide positive pressure at the common refill/evacuation location 2604. The positive pressure actuates the first check valve 2602 and permits the contents of the fluid filter 2614 to be purged in step 2704. The purged contents of the fluid filter 2614 may be forced by the positive pressure into the engine fluid reservoir 2610, for example.

[0173] In step 2706, negative pressure may be introduced at the common refill/evacuation location 2604 through the inlet/outlet port 2612. It can be seen that such negative pressure actuates the second check valve 2608 to permit fluid to be evacuated from the engine fluid reservoir 2610 in step 2708 (which evacuated fluid includes the contents of the fluid filter purged in step 2704) through the second check valve 2608 to exit through the inlet/outlet port 2612. In addition, positive pressure may be introduced in step 2710 at the common refill/evacuation location 2604 such as during performance of a refill fluid operation, for example, to refill the contents of the engine fluid reservoir 2610 in step 2712. It can therefore be seen that the refill fluid encounters the fluid filter 2614 prior to refilling the engine fluid reservoir 2610, and other operative components of the system 2600, which enhances filtration of the refill fluid and which may enhance operation of a machine, for example, operatively associated with the system 2600.

[0174] Referring now to Figure 38, a check valve module 2800 is provided that may include a plurality of check valve assemblies 2820, 2840, 2860 coupled or ganged together to form the module 2800. The individual assemblies 2820, 2840, 2860 may be coupled together by a conventional device or method such as by welding the assemblies 2820, 2840, 2860 to each other, for example. It can be seen that the module embodiments described herein provide

substantially compact and central locations for performance of various fluid operations such as fluid refill, fluid evacuation, and filter purge operations performed on a machine, for example. In various embodiments, one or more of the check valve assemblies 2820, 2840, 2860 may be structured to be part of the same fluid system, or any of the check valve assemblies 2820, 2840, 2860 may be structured for operation as part of an independently operating fluid system.

[0175] In various embodiments, with respect to the first check valve assembly 2820, for example, a first check valve 2822 may be structured with an inlet 2822A in fluid communication with a common refill/evacuation location 2824 and an outlet 2822B in fluid communication with a portion of a fluid system 2826. In certain embodiments, the portion of a fluid system 2826 may be configured to include an operative association with at least a pre-filter portion of the fluid system. A second check valve 2828 of the assembly 2820 includes an inlet 2828A in communication with a fluid reservoir 2830, for example, or another similar structure in fluidic association with the assembly 2820. The second check valve 2828 further includes an outlet 2828B in fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2824. An inlet/outlet port 2832 may be structured for fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2824. In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2832 may be operatively associated with a clustered service location (as described hereinabove), for example. In certain embodiments, a quick disconnect (not shown) may be operatively associated with the common refill/evacuation location 2824 to permit ready connection and disconnection of fluidic structures in operative association with the common refill/evacuation location 2824. In various embodiments, the check valves 2822, 2828 may comprise cartridge type check valves, for example.

[0176] In various embodiments, the inlet 2822A of the first check valve 2822 may be structured to respond to application of positive pressure (represented by arrow 2834) at the common refill/evacuation location 2824, which response to the positive pressure 2834 includes actuating the first check valve 2822 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “positive” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2834 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2832 to the inlet 2822A of the first check valve 2822). During a refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2834 at the common refill/evacuation location 2824 permits fluid flowing from the inlet/outlet port 2832 to flow through the first check valve 2822 to the portion of a fluid system 2826.

[0177] Conversely, the second check valve 2828 may be structured to respond to application of negative pressure (represented by arrow 2836) at the common refill/evacuation location 2824, which response to the negative pressure 2836 includes actuating the second check valve 2828 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “negative” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2836 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the outlet 2828B of the second check valve 2828 to the inlet/outlet port 2832). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2836 at the common refill/evacuation location 2824 permits fluid to flow through the second check valve 2828 to the inlet/outlet port 2832 of the assembly 2820. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit alternative performance of positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations at the common refill/evacuation location 2824.

[0178] In other aspects of the check valve system 2800, with reference to the second check valve assembly 2840, a third check valve 2842 may be structured with an inlet 2842A in fluid communication with a common refill/evacuation location 2844 and an outlet 2842B in fluid communication with a portion of a fluid system 2846. In certain embodiments, the portion of a fluid system 2846 may be configured to include an operative association with at least a pre-filter portion of the fluid system. A fourth check valve 2848 of the assembly 2840 includes an inlet 2848A in fluid communication with a fluid reservoir 2850, for example, or another similar structure fluidically associated with the assembly 2840. The fourth check valve 2848 further includes an outlet 2848B in fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2844. An inlet/outlet port 2852 may be structured for fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2844. In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2852 may be operatively associated with a clustered service location (as described hereinabove), for example. In certain embodiments, a quick disconnect (not shown) may be operatively associated with the common refill/evacuation location 2844 to permit ready connection or disconnection of fluidic structures in operative association with/from the common refill/evacuation location 2844. In various embodiments, the check valves 2842, 2848 may comprise cartridge type check valves, for example.

[0179] In various embodiments, the inlet 2842A of the third check valve 2842 may be structured to respond to application of positive pressure (represented by arrow 2854) at the common refill/evacuation location 2844, which response to the positive pressure 2854 includes actuating the third check valve 2842 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “positive” means pressure which is at a level

sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2854 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2852 to the inlet 2842A of the third check valve 2842). During a refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2854 at the common refill/evacuation location 2844 permits fluid flowing from the inlet/outlet port 2852 to flow through the third check valve 2842 to the portion of a fluid system 2846.

[0180] Conversely, the fourth check valve 2848 may be structured to respond to application of negative pressure (represented by arrow 2856) at the common refill/evacuation location 2844, which response to the negative pressure 2856 includes actuating the fourth check valve 2848 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “negative” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2856 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the outlet 2848B of the fourth check valve 2848 to the inlet/outlet port 2852). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2856 at the common refill/evacuation location 2844 permits fluid to flow through the fourth check valve 2848 to the inlet/outlet port 2852 of the assembly 2840. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit alternative performance of positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations at the common refill/evacuation location 2844.

[0181] With reference to the third check valve assembly 2860 of the system 2800, a fifth check valve 2862 may have an inlet 2862A in fluid communication with a common refill/evacuation location 2864 and an outlet 2862B in fluid communication with a portion of a fluid system 2866. In certain embodiments, the portion of a fluid system 2866 may be configured to include an operative association with at least a pre-filter portion of the fluid

system. A sixth check valve 2868 of the assembly 2860 includes an inlet 2868A in fluid communication with a fluid reservoir 2870, for example, or another similar structure included within the fluid system. The sixth check valve 2868 further includes an outlet 2868B in fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2864. An inlet/outlet port 2872 may be structured for fluid communication with the common refill/evacuation location 2864. In various embodiments, the inlet/outlet port 2872 may be operatively associated with a clustered service location (as described hereinabove), for example. In certain embodiments, a quick disconnect (not shown) may be operatively associated with the common refill/evacuation location 2864 to permit ready connection and disconnection of fluidic structures in operative association with the common refill/evacuation location 2864. In various embodiments, the check valves 2862, 2868 may comprise cartridge type check valves, for example.

[0182] In various embodiments, the inlet 2862A of the fifth check valve 2862 may be structured to respond to application of positive pressure (represented by arrow 2874) at the common refill/evacuation location 2864, which response to the positive pressure 2874 includes actuating the fifth check valve 2862 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “positive” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2874 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2872 to the inlet 2862A of the fifth check valve 2862). During a refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2874 at the common refill/evacuation location 2864 permits fluid flowing from the inlet/outlet port 2872 to flow through the fifth check valve 2862 to the portion of a fluid system 2866.

[0183] Conversely, the sixth check valve 2868 may be structured to respond to application of negative pressure (represented by arrow 2876) at the common refill/evacuation location 2864, which response to the negative pressure 2876 includes actuating the sixth check valve 2868 and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term “negative” means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2876 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the outlet 2868B of the sixth check valve 2868 to the inlet/outlet port 2872). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2876 at the common refill/evacuation location 2864 permits fluid to flow through the sixth check valve 2868 to the inlet/outlet port 2872 of the assembly 2860. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit alternative performance of positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations at the common refill/evacuation location 2864.

[0184] It can be seen that multiple check valve assembly configurations (e.g., such as the module 2800 that includes the check valve assemblies 2820, 2840, 2860) permit multiple fluid operations such as refill operations, evacuation operations, and/or filter purge operations, for example, to be performed on multiple fluid reservoirs. It can be appreciated that any number of check valve assemblies may be provided as a module within the scope of the present methods and systems. The illustration of three separate check valve assemblies 2820, 2840, 2860 in Figure 38, for example, is merely for purposes of convenience of disclosure. More or less check valve assemblies may be employed in operative association with fluid systems configured in accordance with the present invention. Each of the portions of a fluid system 2826, 2846, 2866 may include any reasonable combination of valves, pipes, reservoirs and/or other fluidic

structures. In various embodiments, one or more of the fluid reservoirs 2830, 2850, 2870 may contain a quantity of a fluid such as oil, transmission fluid, hydraulic fluid, or another type of fluid described hereinabove and/or any other fluid suitable for use in accordance with the present systems and methods.

[0185] In various embodiments, one or more adapter fittings such as fittings 2882, 2884, 2886, 2888, 2890, 2892, for example, may promote operative structure of the module 2800 with one or more of the portions of a fluid system 2826, 2846, 2866; one or more of the fluid reservoirs 2830, 2850, 2870; and/or other suitable fluidic structures in operative association with the check valve module 2800.

[0186] Referring now to Figure 39, an electronic valve module 2900 structured and operative substantially similarly to the check valve module of Figure 38 (see previous discussion) is provided. In the embodiments of Figure 39, inserted in place of the check valves 2822, 2828, 2842, 2848, 2862, 2868, respectively, are a plurality of electronic valves 2822', 2828', 2842', 2848', 2862', 2868'. In analogous accordance with the embodiments of Figure 38, the electronic valve assemblies 2820', 2840', 2860' of Figure 39 may be coupled or ganged together to form the electronic module 2900. The individual assemblies 2820', 2840', 2860' may be coupled together by a conventional device or method such as by welding the assemblies 2820', 2840', 2860' to each other, for example. It can be seen that the module embodiments described herein provide substantially compact and central locations for performance of various fluid operations such as fluid refill, fluid evacuation, and filter purge operations performed on a machine, for example.

[0187] In various embodiments, a control module 3002 may be operatively associated with one or more of the electronic valves 2822', 2828', 2842', 2848', 2862', 2868' to actuate the valves 2822', 2828', 2842', 2848', 2862', 2868' upon sensing a predetermined pressure level, for example, within one or more of the assemblies 2820', 2840', 2860' of the electronic module 2900. One or more sensors such as pressure sensors 3004, 3006, 3008, 3010, 3012, 3014, for example, may be operatively associated with the control module 3002 and/or the electronic valves 2822', 2828', 2842', 2848', 2862', 2868', respectively, to provide pressure level information, for example, to the control module 3002.

[0188] The sensor 3004 associated with the first electronic valve 2822' of the first electronic valve assembly 2820' of the module 2900, for example, may be configured to communicate a signal indicative of application of positive pressure 2834 at the common refill/evacuation location 2824, which response to the positive pressure 2834 includes actuating the first electronic valve 2822' to permit fluid flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term "positive" means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the positive pressure flow 2834 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from the inlet/outlet port 2832 to an inlet 2822A' of the first electronic valve 2822'). During a refill operation, for example, application of positive pressure 2834 at the common refill/evacuation location 2824, and subsequent actuation of the first electronic valve 2822' by the control module 3002, for example, together permit fluid to flow from the inlet/outlet port 2832, through the first electronic valve 2822' to the portion of the fluid system 2826.

[0189] In addition, the sensor 3006 associated with the second electronic valve 2828', for example, may be configured to communicate a signal indicative of application of negative

pressure 2836 at the common refill/evacuation location 2824, which response to the negative pressure 2836 includes actuating the second electronic valve 2828' and permitting fluid to flow therethrough. As applied herein with respect to pressure levels, the term "negative" means pressure which is at a level sufficient to move a fluid or fluids in the direction of the negative pressure flow 2836 (e.g., fluid moving in a direction from an outlet 2828B' of the second electronic valve 2828' to the inlet/outlet port 2832). During an evacuation operation, for example, application of negative pressure 2836 at the common refill/evacuation location 2824, and subsequent actuation of the second electronic valve 2828', permit fluid to flow through the second electronic valve 2828' to the inlet/outlet port 2832 of the assembly 2820'. It can be appreciated that the present systems and methods permit alternative positive pressure fluid operations or negative pressure fluid operations to be performed at the common refill/evacuation location 2824.

[0190] It can be seen that multiple electronic valve assembly configurations (e.g., such as the module 2900 that includes the electronic valve assemblies 2820', 2840', 2860') permit multiple fluid operations such as refill operations, evacuation operations, and/or filter purge operations, for example, to be performed on multiple fluid reservoirs. It can be appreciated that any number of electronic valve assemblies may be provided in a module within the scope of the present methods and systems. The illustration of three separate electronic valve assemblies 2820', 2840', 2860' in Figure 39, for example, is merely for purposes of convenience of disclosure. More or less electronic valve assemblies may be employed in operative association with fluid systems configured in accordance with the present invention.

[0191] Referring now to Figure 40, alternative embodiments of a module 3100 are provided in analogous structural and operative accordance with the embodiments of Figures 38 and 39 (see above). As shown, valves 2822'' and 2828'' may be threadedly received into a first assembly 2820'' of the module 3100; valves 2842'' and 2848'' may be threadedly received into a second assembly 2840'' of the module 3100; and/or valves 2862'' and 2868'' may be threadedly received into a third assembly 2860'' of the module. In various embodiments, the valves 2822'', 2828'', 2842'', 2848'', 2862'', 2868'' may be, where operatively appropriate for the module 3100, check valves, electronic valves, or a combination of both check valves and electronic valves.

[0192] In various embodiments, a control module 3202 may be operatively associated with the module 3100. As shown in Figure 40 by way of illustration, the control module 3002 may be operatively associated with one or more of the valves 2822'', 2828'', 2842'', 2848'', 2862'', 2868'' (which comprise electronic valves in this example) to actuate the valves 2822'', 2828'', 2842'', 2848'', 2862'', 2868'' upon sensing a predetermined pressure level, for example, within one or more of the assemblies 2820'', 2840'', 2860'' of the module 3100. In accordance with prior discussion hereinabove, one or more sensors such as pressure sensors 3204, 3206, 3208, 3210, 3212, 3214, for example, may be operatively associated with the control module 3202 and/or the electronic valves 2822'', 2828'', 2842'', 2848'', 2862'', 2868'', respectively, to provide pressure level information, for example, to the control module 3002.

[0193] It can be seen that the various embodiments of valve assemblies and valve systems described herein purge pre-filter portions, filter portions and/or post-filter portions of the various fluid systems described herein. It can be appreciated that any one or more of the fluid

operation method steps described herein, alone or in combination, may be performed in accordance with the present systems and methods. The steps may be employed to perform a variety of fluid operations including, for example and without limitation, refill, evacuation, and/or filter purge operations.

[0194] Where applicable and operational in the context of various embodiments of valve assemblies and systems described herein, one or more valves may be in a normally closed or normally open position prior to, during, or after performance of a particular fluid operation. In addition, one or more types of valves may be employed in certain embodiments of the present systems and methods (e.g., all check valves may be used, all electronic valves may be used, or some reasonable combination of both check valves and electronic valves may be employed).

[0195] It can be appreciated that, where applicable and operational in the context of various embodiments of valve assemblies and systems described herein, performing a refill fluid operation to a pre-filter portion of a fluid system improves filtration of the refill fluid. In various embodiments, the refill fluid encounters at least one filter, for example, before the refill fluid encounters various other operative components of the fluid system.

[0196] Referring again to Figures 34, 35, 39 and 40 (and in analogous structural, functional and operational accordance with prior discussion hereinabove with reference to Figure 20, in particular), one or more of the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202 may include various components for controlling and monitoring a fluid system, as well as for monitoring, collecting and analyzing data associated with the various fluid system and method embodiments described herein. For example, the various sensors described in Figures 34, 35, 39 and 40 can include, for example and without limitation, sensors to detect temperature, pressure, voltage,

current, contaminants, cycle time, flow sensors (presence or absence of flow), automatic “off” of one or more pumps in a fluid system, and/or other sensors suitable for detecting various conditions experienced by a machine and its components. The control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202 may also include one or more data storage media for storing, retrieving and/or reporting data communicated to the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202. Data stored within these data storage media may include a variety of data collected from the condition of a fluid system including, for example and without limitation, oil condition, particle count of contaminants, cycle time data for time to evacuate or time to refill a given reservoir, time stamp data on a reservoir-by-reservoir basis, time stamp data on a system-by-system basis, fluid receptacle or other fluid storage/retention medium. In addition, the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202 may include controls that actuate (e.g., open or close) their respectively associated electronic valves in accordance with pressure levels, for example, sensed at various inlets or outlets of the electronic valves.

[0197] Data can be communicated to the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202 to and/or from a fluid system through a variety of methods and systems. In various embodiments disclosed herein, data may be communicated, for example, by a wireline connection, communicated by satellite communications, cellular communications, infrared and/or communicated in accordance with a protocol such as IEEE 802.11, for example, or other wireless or radio frequency communication protocol among other similar types of communication methods and systems. One or more data devices can be employed in operative association with the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202 for the purpose of receiving, processing, inputting and/or storing data and/or for cooperating with the control modules 2316,

2502, 3002, 3202 to control, monitor or otherwise manipulate one or more components included within a fluid system. Examples of data devices include, for example and without limitation, personal computers, laptops, and personal digital assistants (PDA's), and other data devices suitable for executing instructions on one or more computer-readable media.

[0198] In certain embodiments, the various sensors described in Figures 34, 35, 39 and 40 can be configured to detect one or more of the following conditions within a fluid system: engine oil pressure, oil temperature in the engine, amount of current drawn by a pre-lubrication circuit, presence of contaminants (such as oil contaminants, for example) in the engine, amount of time that has elapsed for performance of one or more cycles of various engine operations (i.e., cycle time) such as fluid purge operations, pre-lubrication operations, fluid evacuation operations, fluid refill operations, fluid flow rates, and others. One example of a sensor that may be used in accordance with various embodiments of the present systems and methods is a contamination sensor marketed under the "LUBRIGARD" trade designation (Lubrigard Limited, United Kingdom, North America, Europe). A contamination sensor can provide information regarding oxidation products, water, glycol, metallic wear particles, and/or other contaminants that may be present in the engine oil, hydraulic oil, gearbox oil, transmission oil, compressor oil and/or other fluids used in various machines. In various aspects of the present methods and systems, the contamination sensor may be employed during one or more fluid processes, for example, such as a fluid evacuation operation or a fluid refill operation.

[0199] It can be appreciated that the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202 may receive and store data associated with activation and deactivation of various components of a fluid system and operation of a machine, such as an engine, for example, included within the

fluid system. Cycle time, for example, can be calculated from analysis of collected data to provide an indication of elapsed time for completing evacuation and/or refill operations. For a given oil temperature or temperature range (e.g., as can be detected and communicated by a temperature sensor), an average cycle time, for example, can be calculated through analysis of two or more collected cycle times. In various aspects, the present methods and systems can determine whether the most recently elapsed cycle time deviates from a nominal average cycle time, or range of cycle times, for a given oil temperature or temperature range. In addition, factors may be known such as the type and viscosity of fluids (e.g., such as oil) used in connection with operation of the machine. An unacceptable deviation from a nominal cycle time, or range of times, can result in recording a fault in data storage media of the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202. It can be appreciated that many other types of fault conditions may be detected, analyzed and recorded in connection with practice of the present systems and methods.

[0200] Collected and analyzed data, as well as recorded fault events, can be stored in association with the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202, internal data modules associated with the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202, and/or at a remote location. In various embodiments, the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202 may be configured for operation as integral components of a machine or as remote components not installed locally on the machine. The collected and analyzed information can be stored in one or more data storage media of the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202. The information can also be stored externally with respect to a machine and its components. Data may be transmitted wirelessly by a radio frequency communication or by a wireline connection from the control modules 2316, 2502,

3002, 3202 to one or more data devices such as a personal digital assistant, for example, configured and employed as a computer system for receiving and processing data collected from the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202 during fluid evacuation and fluid refill processes.

[0201] In one illustrative example, information related to an oil filter purge operation, such as the date and time of the filter purge or the cycle time of the filter purge, for example, and/or other machine conditions can be recorded and processed in connection with operation of the control modules 2316, 2502, 3002, 3202. In addition, the condition (e.g., open or closed) of various valve inlets and outlets, and the date/time at which they are actuated, may be detected, recorded and/or analyzed for various fluid operations. In accordance with the systems and methods disclosed herein, data may be collected and recorded on a reservoir-by-reservoir basis and/or on a fluid system-by-fluid system basis as service is performed on a machine, for example.

[0202] Referring now to Figures 41A through 41C, various embodiments of a connection / disconnection detection system 4000 are provided in accordance with the present invention. As shown, a first coupling portion 4002 is fluidically connected to a portion of a first fluid system 4003 (shown partially for convenience of illustration), and a second coupling portion 4004 is fluidically connected to a portion of a second fluid system 4005 (shown partially for convenience of illustration). In various embodiments, the first and second fluid systems may be structured as independently operated fluid systems or may be structured for operation as part of a single fluid system. The first coupling portion 4002 may include one or more electrical contacts 4006, 4008 and the second coupling portion 4004 may include at least one electrical contact 4010.

[0203] As shown in Figure 41B, upon connection of the first coupling portion 4002 to the second coupling portion 4004, an operative association is established among the electrical contacts 4006, 4008, 4010. In the example shown, connection of the coupling portions 4002, 4004 is established by inserting the second coupling portion 4004 into the first coupling portion 4002 and rotating the second coupling portion 4004 in the direction of the arrow 4011. It can be appreciated, however, that any suitable method or device for connecting the coupling portions 4002, 4004 may be employed within the scope of the present invention. In certain embodiments, the electrical contacts 4006, 4008, 4010 may be replaced with any suitable device or method for establishing an electrical operative association using the coupling portions 4002, 4004. Examples of other devices include, without limitation, sensors, contact switches, magnetic switches, Hall effect sensors, and/or any other operationally and structurally suitable devices.

[0204] In various embodiments, the electrical contacts 4006, 4008 are operatively associated with a signal processor 4012. The signal processor 4012 may include a sensor/receiver 4014 for receiving an electrical signal from the contacts 4006, 4008 once the contact 4010 of the first coupling portion 4002 completes an electrical circuit with the contacts 4006, 4008 of the second coupling portion 4004 upon connection of the coupling portions 4002, 4004. A transmitter 4016 may be included within the signal processor 4012 for transmitting the electrical signal representative of the connection and/or data representative of the electrical signal to a control module 4018. The control module 4018 may be configured to function in accordance with the various embodiments of control modules described previously herein. For example, the control module 4018 may record in a suitable storage medium a date and/or a time when connection or disconnection of the coupling portions 4002, 4004 has occurred.

[0205] Referring now to Figure 41C, in another mode of operation of the connection / disconnection detection system 4000, the second coupling portion 4004 may be moved in the direction of the arrow 4026 to initiate disconnection of the second coupling portion 4004 from the first coupling portion 4002. As shown, the disconnection of the coupling portions 4002, 4004 results in disassociation of the electrical contact 4010 from the electrical contacts 4006, 4008. In various embodiments, the sensor/receiver 4014 of the signal processor 4012 may be configured to detect this disassociation of the electrical contacts 4006, 4008, 4010. An electrical signal representative of the disconnection and/or a data signal representative of the disconnection of the coupling portions 4002, 4004 may be transmitted through the transmitter 4016 for further processing by the control module 4018. For example, the control module 4018 may record in a suitable storage medium a date and/or a time when the disconnection of the coupling portions 4002, 4004 occurred.

[0206] The signal processor 4012 further may include a power source 4020 for supplying power to operate the various components of the signal processor 4012. In certain aspects, the power source 4020 may receive electrical energy, for example, from a battery 4022 of a machine 4024 for which various fluid operations are performed.

[0207] Referring now to Figure 42, embodiments of a power supply system 4100 provided in accordance with the present invention are shown. For convenience of disclosure, embodiments of the present invention illustrated in Figure 32 (previously discussed) are shown in operative association with the power supply system 4100. It can be appreciated that the power supply system 4100 may be applied, where structurally and functionally appropriate, to various

embodiments of fluid systems, assemblies and other fluidic components and fluid operations described herein.

[0208] The power supply system 4100 may include a power receptacle 4102 structured to receive a power cord, for example, or other electrically operative connection to one or more of the fluid components 2120. In various embodiments, the power receptacle 4102 is positioned in a location adjacent to or in the vicinity of a fluidic structure, such as the inlet/outlet port 2112, for example. The power receptacle 4102 may be electrically associated with a machine 4104 for which one or more fluid service operations are performed. In certain embodiments, the power receptacle 4102 may be electrically operatively associated with a battery 4106, for example, or other power source of the machine 4104. A converter 4108 may be optionally included within the power supply system 4100 to convert a DC power source of the machine 4104, for example, to an AC power source at the power receptacle 4102, for example, which is accessible for electrical connection of the fluid component 2120 to the power receptacle 4102. In certain embodiments the battery 4106 of the machine 4104 may be replaced or supplemented with an off-board power source, for example, or another power source external to the operation of the machine 4104. Furthermore, it can be appreciated that the fluid components 2120, of either the on-board or off-board variety, may have their own independent power sources in lieu of or in addition to external power sources such as the battery 4106 of the machine 4104, for example.

[0209] The benefits of the present systems and methods are readily apparent to those skilled in the art. Systems and methods for selectively and/or sequentially performing fluid evacuation and/or refill processes can be useful in performing service and maintenance

operations on machines. Such capabilities can ultimately improve the performance and useful life of machines for which such orchestrated fluid evacuation and/or fluid refill procedures are performed. In addition, the use of controls, monitoring, and data storage and analysis in connection with performing multiple fluid evacuation and/or refill processes can further enhance the overall effectiveness of service and maintenance operations performed on a variety of machines.

[0210] It should be appreciated that all the figures are presented for illustrative purposes and not as construction drawings. Omitted details and modifications or alternative embodiments are within the purview of persons of ordinary skill in the art. Furthermore, whereas particular embodiments of the invention have been described herein for the purpose of illustrating the invention and not for the purpose of limiting the same, it will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that numerous variations of the details, materials and arrangement of parts may be made within the principle and scope of the invention without departing from the invention as described in the appended claims.

[0211] The term “computer-readable medium” is defined herein as understood by those skilled in the art. It can be appreciated, for example, that method steps described herein may be performed, in certain embodiments, using instructions stored on a computer-readable medium or media that direct a computer system to perform the method steps. A computer-readable medium can include, for example, memory devices such as diskettes, compact discs of both read-only and writeable varieties, optical disk drives, and hard disk drives. A computer-readable medium can also include memory storage that can be physical, virtual, permanent,

temporary, semi-permanent and/or semi-temporary. A computer-readable medium can further include one or more data signals transmitted on one or more carrier waves.

[0212] As used herein, a “computer” or “computer system” may be a wireless or wireline variety of a microcomputer, minicomputer, laptop, personal data assistant (PDA), cellular phone, pager, processor, or any other computerized device capable of configuration for transmitting and receiving data over a network. Computer devices disclosed herein can include memory for storing certain software applications used in obtaining, processing and communicating data. It can be appreciated that such memory can be internal or external. The memory can also include any means for storing software, including a hard disk, an optical disk, floppy disk, ROM (read only memory), RAM (random access memory), PROM (programmable ROM), EEPROM (extended erasable PROM), and other like computer-readable media.

[0213] It is to be understood that the figures and descriptions of the present invention have been simplified to illustrate elements that are relevant for a clear understanding of the present invention, while eliminating, for purposes of clarity, other elements. Those of ordinary skill in the art will recognize, however, that these and other elements may be desirable. However, because such elements are well known in the art, and because they do not facilitate a better understanding of the present invention, a discussion of such elements is not provided herein.

[0214] It can be appreciated that, in some embodiments of the present methods and systems disclosed herein, a single component can be replaced by multiple components, and multiple components replaced by a single component, to perform a given function or functions.

Except where such substitution would not be operative to practice the present methods and systems, such substitution is within the scope of the present invention.

[0215] Examples presented herein are intended to illustrate potential implementations of the present method and system embodiments. It can be appreciated that such examples are intended primarily for purposes of illustration. No particular aspect or aspects of the example method and system embodiments described herein are intended to limit the scope of the present invention.

[0216] While the present methods and systems have been principally described in relation to relatively large-scale diesel engines, it should be recognized that the invention is also useful in a wide variety of other types of internal combustion engines. For example, use of the present methods and systems in automotive applications is contemplated, such as in connection with automotive engines. Thus, whereas particular embodiments of the invention have been described herein for the purpose of illustrating the invention and not for the purpose of limiting the same, it can be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that numerous variations of the details, materials and arrangement of parts may be made within the principle and scope of the invention without departing from the invention as described in the appended claims.